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THE ETNA MESSAGES

And Other Stories

BY

SIDNEY RALLI



HIND KITABS

PUBLISHERS: BOMBAY

Gazdar Mansion, 267, Hornby Road, Fort

By the same author :

Air Over Eden (Hutchinson)

By Order of the Shah (Cassell)

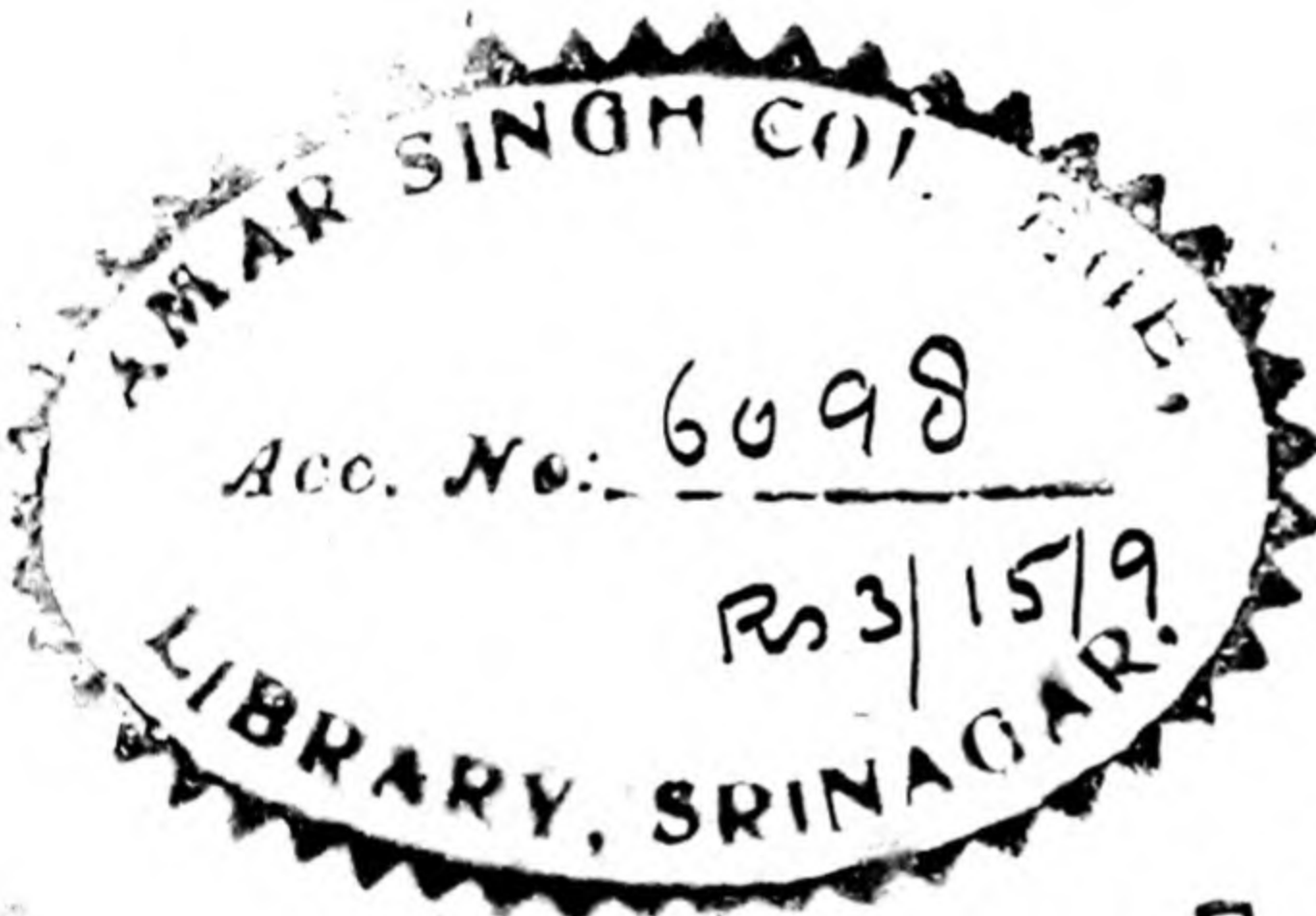
Historic Lucknow (Pioneer Press)

} in collaboration with 'HW'

In Preparation :

The Young Rajah (Thacker & Co.)

Tom's Own Day (Thacker & Co.)



29.7.46

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Thanks are due to the Editors of the following journals who have kindly allowed me to reproduce stories originally appearing in their pages: *The Illustrated Weekly of India, The All-India Motorist, The Amrita Bazar Patrika, The Hindu, The Pioneer.*

All characters in this book are imaginary, and no reference is made or intended to any living person.

S.R.

The Etna Messages

A STORY OF THE INVASION OF SICILY IN 1943

As Colonel Bellometti rose to his feet, the buzz of conversation round the table ceased, and all heads were turned in his direction.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I have called this conference in order to acquaint you with some disquieting news that has reached me. You are all aware that the authorities are gravely concerned over the accurate bombing by the English airmen of our aerodromes here in Sicily. The airport at Catania was, of course, shown on peace-time maps, and used to be a landing ground for civil aviators. But the carefully guarded secret of the aerodrome constructed at Augusta since the outbreak of hostilities....how can its details have become known to our enemies? They even know the exact location of the subterranean reserve petrol tanks.

'It was certainly not by chance that the Englishmen dive-bombed and hit the very spot, for the tanks were so carefully concealed in several acres of crops that one could not tell their presence twenty yards away. They have been bombed not once or twice but many times, so it cannot be attributed to misfortune.

'And now I have here a report from the Intelligence Branch in which Captain von Marsch—one of our foremost Intelligence Officers—says that he suspects the presence of a spy among the workmen who pass in and out of the Augusta camp. Carefully supervised though they are, it is impossible to segregate all the work-people from contact with other citizens. Not only that; as of course you know, Sicily at one time—indeed, only three or four generations ago—came under the government of England, and a number of the islanders are known to have retained a British outlook, in spite of the fact that Italy has done everything in her power to please them.

'The Mafia, that famous brigand organization, is always liable to rear its ugly head now and then.....Also the Duc de Bronte himself is, as you know, an Englishman—Lord Nelson was the first Duc, and there was, until war broke out, a large English settlement in and around Taormina.

'I need say nothing more to show you the many difficulties confronting us in attempting to locate a spy. Many of the islanders have British associations, and yet they are wholeheartedly patriots for Italy and the New Order. But the fact remains that this spy

menace must be dealt with. The aerodrome now being constructed near Meldrusa, for instance. At all costs that must be kept secret from the enemy.

'So, gentlemen, it is up to all of you, as heads of one or other of the military and air-force camps scattered over Sicily, to be on the alert. It is not so much that we wish to catch the spy. On the contrary. We want to find out how he gets his information through. Once we have discovered the leakage channel we can continue to leave the informer at large, and quietly tap his messages. The coast watchers say they are positive that no ships leave the shore unaccounted for. How, then, does the news get through? This is our problem. That is all, gentlemen. Be on the alert!'

Chairs were scraped back, file covers and pencils were collected, and the conference broke up.

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Quietly, unobtrusively, and of such every-day occurrence that it attracted nobody's notice, a Sicilian country-cart climbed the long wide hill road leading out of Catania and up the slopes of Mount Etna.

These two-wheeled carts are characteristic of Sicily, and are decorated with highly coloured illustrations of Sicilian history and mythology. The pony's harness is equally gay, with festoons of pom-poms and nodding scarlet plumes. Vegetables grown upon the fertile hill slopes, or merchandise from the narrow seaboard, are the usual loads carried to the villages tucked away in the mountain fastnesses.

To all intents and purposes this cart, slowly climbing the gradual slopes which form the foothills of Mount Etna, carried sacks of potatoes and baskets of purple cauliflowers. Apparently, too, the owner of the cart was one of a thousand similar men, in his corduroy trousers, open-neck shirt, well-worn jacket and slouch hat. He spoke the Sicilian dialect as well as many a mainland Italian, and was, if anybody questioned him, bound for the Hotel Etna, a shining chromium and concrete example of a luxury hotel built a few years ago high up on the slopes of the volcano. In peace time it is used as a centre for walking tours in the summer and ski-ing in the winter.

Trams passed him, and a few official cars filled with officers in uniform. Many bicycles and hurrying figures on foot were descending the hill to the town for their daily work, for it was still early morning. Gradually, unhurrying, the cart drew away from the outskirts of the town and into the sparsely populated countryside. Sprawling like dead grey glaciers, here and there great streams of

lava, which had once brought destruction in their wake, straddled the landscape. No trees grew, and the road had been cut through the thick mass of lava, which spread out as it left behind the spurs of the foothills.

* * * *

Still the cart, drawn by its sturdy pony, plodded along upwards, the driver greeting none, and being recognized by none. It was nearly midday when he finally left the villages behind, and started up the well-graded motor road. For several miles, isolated chalets dotted the steep mountain side, which was ablaze with wild flowers, and studded with stunted, wind-swept trees between the rivers of lava.

Ultimately the road branched into two. One arm led to the Hotel Etna, and the other to a circular terminus where the usual tourist shop sold trinkets and picture post-cards.

The day wore on, but the driver of the cart showed no eagerness to deliver his merchandise at the hotel. Indeed, he stopped more than once upon a conveniently widened bend for a brief meal or a smoke, so that by the time he came in sight of the hotel it was beginning to get dark. As he stood at the fork of the road, gusts of dance music reached him from the ball-room. Here and there lights glowed through the modern steel-casemented windows, built to withstand the violent winter storms that swept up from the sea.

Up the right fork of the road lay the tourist terminus. Gradually dusk fell, but the cart still stood by the roadside. When it was quite dark the driver rose to his feet and rummaged beneath his merchandise. After a few moments he produced four felt boots, which he fastened to the pony's hoofs. Then, catching hold of the bridle, he led the pony forward towards the tourist terminus.

When he had nearly reached the end of the road, he stopped and turned the pony and the cart into a small clearing that had been dug out to hold road-mending materials. Here he tied up the pony. From the cart he took several boxes and coils of wire and other apparatus, and disappeared with them into the stunted trees. He had obviously carried out the same routine before; for, quickly and easily he rigged up a temporary aerial between two convenient trees, set his apparatus in place, and sat down to wait, giving an occasional glance at his watch when the red-tinted smoke from the crater of the volcano glowed bright enough to illuminate the dial.

He had waited for nearly an hour, when his watch showed ten o'clock. He got up, tested the radio set, and sat down again, facing towards the sea, which lay fifteen or twenty miles beyond the road up which he had come. Finally his watch said eight minutes past ten. He opened the small radio transmitter fitted

into a box, and began to send a message in code. Endlessly, over and over again, he repeated the message.

After nearly an hour his quick ear caught a sound, and he stopped working to listen. Faintly at first, then increasing in volume, the sinister drum-drum-drumming of aeroplane engines beat on the night air. The man could hear the warning sirens from Catania, their screeching wail borne up the mountain side by the chill breeze.

He resumed his message-sending, pausing now and again to observe in which direction the aeroplanes were shaping their course.

* * * *

Bill Mercer, crouched in the rear of the big bomber, and without removing his head-phones, scribbled something on a slip of paper and passed it forward to the pilot.

'Picked up my brother,' it read. 'He's sending us to that petrol dump outside Augusta aerodrome first, then to a new objective.'

The pilot nodded. For some minutes he had stopped navigating by his instruments, for he had picked up one of the few things it is impossible to camouflage—the dull glow from the volcanic crater of Mount Etna.

Bill continued to take down messages and send forward the information. Soon, as near as they could judge by their instruments, they were flying over Augusta, and Bill gave the sergeant-gunner a nudge to tell him to be ready to release the bomb load as they swooped nearer the ground. Crouching over his instrument, Bill suddenly received and gave the order 'Now!' and at a touch upon the lever a stick of bombs went hurtling down. The aeroplane immediately climbed steeply, and made off out of the range of the anti-aircraft guns and searchlights as fast as it could.

Bill Mercer was once again listening to his radio, and busily transcribing a further message:

'Set course due E. N. E. Fly for 18 miles, then pick up further directions.'

Bill passed this forward to the pilot, who nodded and adjusted his instruments accordingly.

Soon a further message in code came over the air. As before, the bomber lost height, and at a signal from Bill, the sergeant-gunner released a stick of bombs. Rapidly the pilot pulled his stick back and the bomber climbed high. But beyond an explosion with a sheet of flame and columns of smoke, which showed that the bombs had found a vulnerable target, there was no sound from below. Evidently, the defences had been caught napping; if

indeed defences there were, for this was a new objective the R.A.F. had not visited before.

Circling round, once again a stick of bombs was released, and the conflagration on the ground reached still greater proportions. Then, their night's work done, they turned their backs on the dull glare from Etna and set a course in the direction of their Mediterranean base.

* * * *

Bill sent a signal to his brother.

'O.K., old man. Good work. Meet you usual place tomorrow.'

John Mercer, still crouched among the trees on Mount Etna, straightened his chilled and stiffened limbs. Quickly he dismantled his aerials, coiled and packed away the wire, and returned to his cart. It was about three in the morning when he set off down the mountain side. Arriving at the fork in the road, he removed the pony's felt boots and became once again the innocent vegetable seller.

Instead of taking the straight road down to Catania, however, he branched off to the left. All day he and his pony trudged, until, as the sun set, they reached a little village nestling in a quiet cove behind a high rocky promontory.

He stabled the horse, pushed the cart into a shed, and stumbled down a steep stony path to the shore. There a light row-boat was lying. He got in, pushed off, and rowed quietly out to sea, equipped with lobster pots in case anyone should question his going.

For an hour he rowed steadily, helped by the ebbing tide and steering by compass. Then, shipping his oars, he stood up and peered into the darkness. For a few minutes he saw nothing. Then, far away in the velvet night there was a stab of light, a mere pin-point. Quickly John took out a powerful electric torch and flashed it in answer. Then bending to his oars, he rowed in the same direction.

* * * *

Eventually the two points of light converged. At last John shipped his oars for the last time as he drew alongside a collapsible rubber dinghy, occupied by a single figure. Clambering in, he made fast the painter of his row boat to the dinghy and the two men each took an oar and rowed for a further half mile until they reached a Singapore type of flying-boat riding on the calm sea.

It was broad daylight as willing hands pulled John and his companion into the flying-boat. Rapidly, while one member of the crew scuttled John's dinghy, the engines of the flying-boat were

started up, and she taxied off, eventually heading for her Mediterranean base.

There was no stirring announcement in the press. No medals were given. There was simply a curt announcement in the morning newspapers, which ran as follows:—*'Among other objectives, units of the R.A.F. operating from one of our Mediterranean bases, bombed the airport at Catania, a vital oil reservoir at Augusta, and a new aerodrome at Meldrusa. All our aircraft returned safely.'*

The Wedding

Lieut. General Sir Bruce Colville, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., struggled into his full-dress uniform. The stand-up collar was a trifle tighter than he would have wished, but the real devil of getting into full dress was the distribution of his orders and medals.

'Mahomed Ismail! Come here, you son of a gun. Where the dickens d'you get to? Come and put these things in place.'

'Hazoor!' panted Mahomed Ismail, as he ran perspiring round his master's well-preserved form. The ribbon of one order was pinned in place at the back of the braces. Two more, which adorned the front of an already resplendent scarlet tunic, were secured by safety-pins just inside the button-holes. Another, a sparkling foreign order presented by a Near Eastern potentate, bore no ribbon, but was hooked on somewhere below the left breast.

Sir Bruce, who as far as possible liked doing things for himself, dismissed Mahomed Ismail, and proceeded to add finishing touches to his already gorgeous exterior.

'Hugh's a good lad,' he mused to himself. 'I'm glad Anita chose him. She had plenty of variety, I must say. Attractive little thing, if she is my own daughter. Got a good deal of her old father in her, too. Ambitious. Very ambitious. Ambition got me where I am.'

He paused to examine his greying temples in the mirror.

'Ambition. That's what every fellah needs—what he must have. Young Hugh's got it too, glad to say. Anita'll be all right. He's got a bit of money. Not over-burdened with it, but enough to grease the wheels. He'll get on, too. In a crack cavalry regiment—mechanized, it's true, but most of 'em are, now-a-days. Good-lookin', a four handicap at polo, popular in the mess, and with good manners—and above all, keen on his job.'

'Had many a talk with him about his prospects. One of the few young chaps who condescends to ask the advice of an old-stager like myself. If he gets into the Staff College next year, and does well enough to go on to the Senior Officers' Course, there ought to be no stoppin' him. Let me see. It's twenty to three, nearly time for Anita and me to broach that half bottle of the Widow before we set off!'

* * * *

Lady Colville carefully drew on her gossamer stockings, slipped into her elegant new navy-blue shoes, and stood up, a tall thin figure in a silken petticoat, to take her dress from its coat-hanger.

'Anita,' she thought. 'My eldest baby. I shall never stop thinking of her as my baby, even though she *has* laughed me out of saying so. She and Hugh will make a fine pair, right from the very beginning, from the moment they stand together at the top of the aisle. Anita would make a fine wife for any man. And I must say, I think Hugh's a good choice on her part. She could have married so many men in the three years she's been out here.

'She'll help Hugh in his career. An ambitious girl like Anita will get Hugh on all right. She'll make an excellent C.O.'s wife, and she'll be able to cope with any generals and other officials who may be thrust upon them. I've taught her that. She owes it to me. And she's got my poise, too; my flair for saying the right thing at the right moment.

'When Hugh gets too senior to be in a regiment, she'll rise with him as the perfect general's wife. I've taught her to dress well, talk well, have a good presence in society, and I'm sure she'll be a credit to me, with a man like Hugh beside her. Heavens! What's the time? Twenty to three? I must go and put the finishing touches to Anita!'

* * * *

Colonel James Knox, O.B.E., worked his way with a sigh into his starched khaki drill uniform with its well-polished buttons.

'Hugh's done well for himself,' he thought. 'One of the best subalterns I ever had, and an even better squadron-commander. He'll go high. I'll give him a thumping good confidential report, and Sir Bruce is sure to endorse it, as the Army Commander, and, although he wouldn't admit it, even to himself, as his father-in-law. And now, marrying Anita, who's as ambitious as Hugh himself. Oh, yes! He'll get on all right!'

Colonel Knox slipped his sword into place, tweaked the back of his coat, and went into the hall to wait for his wife.

'Hurry up, Helen!' he called. 'It's twenty to three, and we ought to be going.'

Helen Knox—the Honourable Mrs Knox—dabbed her back and shoulders liberally with talcum powder, and sat down at her dressing-table to apply make-up.

'I suppose Hugh had to get married sooner or later,' she mused, as she dabbed on complexion milk. 'And as things are, I suppose Anita's no worse choice than any other girl. She's so ambitious that, even if she did suspect anything between Hugh and me, she'll never admit it, nor let it interfere with his career. Darling Hugh! I haven't seen much of him the last few weeks, but of course it's been difficult for him to get away. He's a good actor, too. Nobody seeing us together in public would suspect a thing. I'm sure that in the years to come, when his biography is written, they'll say that I, the wife of his first commanding-officer, did as much to help on his career as his wife. And I, secretly to myself, will be able to think, "Ah! I did more than that, for I loved him, and he loved me." Hugh! How devoted he is to me.'

She put the finishing touches to her toilette, adjusted her hat with its perky little veil, and gathered up her bag and gloves.

'Yes, coming, James! What's the time? Twenty to three? Yes, we ought to be off! I'm ready!'

* * * *

'It's all very fine, old Hugh getting married,' said Bobby Travers to himself, as he struggled into his well-polished field-boots. 'But I wish he hadn't chosen such a dashed hot day for it. Good chap, old Hugh. Suppose I ought to have got married to Anita by rights, being her father's A.D.C., and all that, but I couldn't have done it. Never be any peace in the house. She'd always be scheming to get me on! Too dashed ambitious for my taste, that girl. It'll suit old Hugh, though. He's as ambitious as they make 'em. Glory be! It's twenty to three. I'd better have the car brought round for the Old Man and Anita, and then collect Lady Colville and take her off to the church.'

* * * *

Henry Swinton felt in his pockets for the ring, located it, and started off in his car to fetch the bridegroom.

'Wish I was in Hugh's shoes,' he thought. 'There's nothing he won't be able to do with Father-in-law to help him, and Anita pushing him along from behind. He'll help himself all right, too. Got brains, position, and push. Good enough for any man.'

He turned into Hugh Graham's compound. 'Hello, there, Hugh! Ready! Twenty to three. We ought to be going.'

* * * *

Hugh Graham glanced at his watch.

'Twenty to three. In twenty minutes Anita will be coming

up the aisle and then we'll be married. Anita! How I love her! I hope that old hag Helen won't sabotage her. How can I ever have thought I was in love with her? Anyway, the first time I saw Anita she wiped Helen straight off the map. Only nine months ago. Seems like years. Dear, darling, adorable Anita!

'I only hope she hasn't got too much of her father in her. I'm quite keen to get along in the army if I can do it in business hours, so to speak. But I won't have any other help if I can possibly avoid it. I don't want Father-in-law poking his nose in, and I won't have Anita turning into the ambitious wife, always pushing me from behind. I hope I'll be able to show her that—quite gently, of course. I intend to get on through my own efforts, or not at all.'

* * * *

And Anita herself, gathering up her train as she stepped into the car, thought shyly:

'Twenty minutes more, and I shall be married. And to Hugh, whom I love more than anything else on earth. And I shall get away from it all, into the bargain. No more striving, and pushing and pulling. No more official dinner-parties, no entertaining of Commanders-in-Chief and Governors. We shall be able to live our own lives, quietly and happily, with no strings to pull and no efforts at "getting-on". How tired I am of those words, although I'm sure Daddy hasn't ever guessed how I loathed being a General's daughter. And now it's all finished with. We can relax, just Hugh and I, and be happy—quietly and peacefully happy.'

The car drew up at the church door. The bridal procession formed, and moved up the aisle to the familiar strains of 'Here comes the Bride'.

Three Lives

A TALE OF BALUCHISTAN

'This is All-India-Radio. Before we take you over for the news from London, here is an announcement. Captain Carl Usmann, the German prisoner who escaped some weeks ago, is believed to be at large in the Baluchistan hills. Any information which may lead to his discovery should at once be communicated to the nearest police post.'

Khan Sahib Mohamed Khan, the Police Sub-Inspector, switched off his radio and sighed contentedly. His was the only set in Harnai and, except for the train which came from Sibi twice a week, almost the only link with the outside world. Harnai lies below the Dilkhuna Pass, and is the railhead for Loralai, Fort Sandeman, and Dehra Ghazi Khan, all vital outposts in Britain's line of frontier defences, linked together only by the slender chain of a motor road. So he had not yet been able to report his single-handed capture of the German who was sitting by his side, drinking lemon squash and nursing a badly sprained ankle.

* * * *

Major David Anderson swung off the train the next morning, followed by Donald Heape, his subaltern, and a company of the Northshires. They had been sent up from Karachi, and were bound for Loralai. There had been a good deal of trouble in those parts of late, and the authorities suspected that the tribesmen were being stirred up by a brain more astute than any of their own.

David Anderson walked along the platform towards the exit, and was met by Mohamed Khan.

'Well, Khan Sahib,' said David. 'Any news from up the pass? Are the lorries ready to take us?'

'Yes, Major Sahib,' replied Mohamed Khan. 'The lorries are waiting over there under the trees. I think I have a visitor whom you will like to take as a passenger—the German whose description has been broadcast. He is in my house under guard. I have been talking to him, and I am sure he is behind those Baluchi tribesmen, inciting them to rebel with promises of German gold when they have thrown off the British yoke. He has been living with them in their caves. Probably he will be useful to you in identifying prisoners when you take them.'

David Anderson nodded thoughtfully. It seemed a good idea.

In an hour's time the men and their kit were all safely stowed into the great army lorries, which set off across the dusty, stony, little plain to the Dilkhuna Pass, the road up which had been carved, blasted, and built up out of the mountain-side many years ago. Donald Heape rode in the first of the long train of vehicles, while Anderson, with Captain Usmann sitting beside him, brought up the rear.

Soon they had crossed the narrow plain. The road followed the course of a mountain torrent, almost dry at that time of the year, its wide, rocky bed studded with huge boulders. Pink oleanders were in full flower under a hard blue sky, and the scenery grew more and more rugged as the lorries approached the foot of the pass.

The foremost lorry halted at a chain looped across the road, which, for the next eight miles, although not particularly hilly, was so narrow, with a high cliff on one side and a deep ravine on the other, that one-way traffic was enforced by a system of telephones.

Word was received that the way was clear, so the vehicles moved on.

* * * *

Nur Din and his son, Badlu Din, squatted in the shade of a boulder. The older man carried a long brass-studded rifle slung across his back. Two pairs of keen, deep-set eyes were turned towards a spot many hundreds of feet below, where the road was just discernible between overhanging rocks.

'Soon they will come, my son,' said Nur Din. 'Then I will avenge the capture, and, who knows, perhaps the death of our friend and leader, the German Captain. Watch, and you shall observe your father's true aim.'

Father and son relaxed for a few minutes. Then Nur Din lay down on his stomach and wormed his way round the boulder, using his life-long experience of mountain warfare to take advantage of every inch of cover, while yet obtaining an uninterrupted view of the road, which ran, perfectly exposed, only a couple of hundred yards beneath him. Across it, hidden from up-coming traffic, he had arranged a neat line of rocks calculated to bring any vehicle to a halt. He motioned Badlu Din to lie behind him, and they settled down to wait.

* * * *

The Northshires arrived at the end of the stretch of narrow road, marked by a second chain, and drew up for a breather before beginning the ascent of the Dilkhuna Pass itself. A sulphur stream bubbled out of the rock, and the lorry drivers filled up their radiators in preparation for the gruelling ascent before them.

Donald Heape looked about him. For hundreds of feet above, a rugged mass of rock rose almost sheer into the sky. Only here and there could he see evidence of engineering, where a particularly wide piece of rivetting jutted out in a regular and orderly line. In the far distance a small square block-house bore silent witness to man's domination.

The men scrambled back into their places, the lorry drivers revived up their engines, and the long ascent began. They had climbed about three-quarters of the way up the pass, when suddenly the driver of Donald's lorry swore and jammed on his brakes. Across the road lay a line of boulders. Instantly Donald grasped the situation and shouted to his men in the body of the lorry to take

cover. Drawing his revolver, he jumped out, and was about to join them, when a shot rang out, and, with a stifled cry, he flung up his arms, spun round, and dropped on the road.

* * * *

Nur Din withdrew his rifle, gave a short dry laugh, and eased himself, a trifle too obviously, from his cramped position. Instantly another shot rang out, this time from a service rifle. Nur Din gave a convulsive wriggle and lay still.

Willing hands soon cleared the road and carefully lifted Donald, who was still breathing, into the lorry. The cavalcade moved on. Badlu Din, stricken with blind rage at his father's death, reached for the latter's rifle with infinite caution. As the last lorry came into view he took careful aim and pulled the trigger. A white-clad figure suddenly sagged in its seat.

Quickly Badlu Din wriggled away and faded into the surrounding country-side as only the born hillman can fade. He was not to know that he had killed his avowed friend and 'liberator', Captain Carl Usmann.

Good Advice.

A TALE OF ANY CANTONMENT

General Manson uncrossed his long legs and went over to the empty fireplace, where he tapped out his pipe, as the butler announced a visitor.

'Major Wilson, Sahib.'

'Show him in, Feroz Khan, then bring drinks.'

Keith Wilson came in, and shook hands with his host.

He was what is described as a fine figure of a man, tall and well set up, with a rugged, pleasantly ugly face. He looked what he was; a good regimental soldier, and a leader of men, but not possessed of overmuch finesse in the drawing-rooms and ball-rooms of India.

'Sit down, won't you, Wilson,' said Manson easily. 'Feroz Khan is bringing drinks, and here's a cigarette.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Keith, sinking into the chair indicated. 'It's very good of you to see me, Sir. The truth is, I've got a bit of a problem on my mind, and I'd like your advice on it. There's nobody in the regiment I care to discuss it with. And anyway, they're all a bit younger than I, except the Colonel, and as you

know, he's on a month's leave just at present. Besides, as it's a purely personal matter, I thought I'd take advantage of the fact that you won't be here much longer, so that nobody in the station will know about my private affairs.'

John Manson nodded. This was a long speech for Keith Wilson, the man of action, not of words, and Manson wondered what was coming.

'Go on,' he said.

Keith drank some of his whisky and soda, began one or two sentences, boggled at them, got up, and ran his fingers through his crisp greying hair. Then he sat down again, rested his elbows on his knees, his head on his hands, and gazing at the carpet, plunged into his story.

'You know my wife, Rosemary, of course, Sir,' he began. 'Well, it's about her. She was engaged to my younger brother once. It's a long story, but he—well, he's a bit of a waster, and the long and the short of it is, that he chucked her. It wasn't altogether his fault. But they were both very young—she's thirteen years younger than I am, by the way—and they both behaved rather stupidly. Rosemary took it very badly, but a few months later she said she'd marry me, and come out here with me. I'd always been in love with her since she was a tiny kid, and although I realized that she couldn't possibly be as fond of me as I was of her, I hoped that it would work—you know, Sir, wishful thinking, perhaps. And it *did* work too. She's always seemed very happy and contented. You can usually tell if somebody you're really fond of, is happy or not, especially when you've known her so well and so long as I've known Rosemary.

'About five months ago we had a slight set-to about something. Oh nothing—some party or other she wanted to go to, and I didn't. But she seemed to take it to heart for a day or two—brooded over it. Then, all of a sudden she brightened up and the whole thing seemed to blow over. We had it out, and she explained that as she was so much younger than I, she loved going to dances and picnics and things. She said she realized that I didn't, but that she'd stretch a point and go by herself. It seemed as good a solution as any, and of course I trusted her implicitly. So we did arrange it that way, and it seemed to work all right. Of course, I heard her coming in pretty late sometimes, but after all, she's not a child. Then, suddenly, about three weeks ago, her manner changed, and she seemed to shrink whenever I touched her. I—I—I blundered in, I suppose, but dash it, she *is* my wife.'

Keith Wilson paused, blew his nose with a loud trumpeting sound, took another gulp of his whisky and soda, which in the

meantime had been replenished, and went on.

'Of course, the obvious thing leapt to my mind and I asked her if there was anyone else. But she swore there wasn't. And I must say I believed her. Then, two days ago, I had a strenuous game of regimental hockey, so I came straight home after the match instead of going to the mess as usual. Rosemary wasn't in, but I didn't expect her to be. She had been playing tennis in a women's four at the Club. So I had my bath and changed, and then sat on the verandah in the dusk while I had my first peg. I was surprised to see Rosemary suddenly coming towards the house not from the direction of the Club, but from No. 1 polo ground. As you know, Sir, there are no bungalows over there at all. She came up the steps, not realizing that I was on the verandah, and I could hear her quietly sobbing. I asked her what was the matter and where she had been. To my intense surprise she burst into a storm of tears and rushed into her bedroom.

'She slammed and locked the door, and wouldn't let me in. In fact, she seemed to forget my very existence, and to lose all control over herself. She screamed and gasped and the only thing I could hear between her sobs was "He's going, he's going. Oh, oh—I shall be left here alone—o—h—He's go-o-oing." That made me think a bit, I can tell you. It must be one of the subalterns in the regiment, because she's always playing tennis or golf, and or dancing with one or another of them. And I'm pretty certain its young Gerald Adams. Now I come to think of it, he has been hanging about the bungalow rather more than some of the others. As you know, the regiment is being mechanized, and Adams was detailed to go on a course. Rosemary seems to have got a grip on herself now, and I wasn't going to say any more about it. But yesterday an order came through saying that Adams is not to go after all. So what do you think I should do, Sir?'

General Manson carefully stubbed out his cigarette before replying.

'I should let bygones be bygones if I were you, Wilson,' he said slowly. 'As you say, your wife is young and attractive, and probably impressionable. And as a matter of fact, I can set your mind at rest, because I've just received young Adam's application for a five-year commission in the R.A.F. I shall endorse his application and add a note to see that it is put through as quickly as possible. You may, of course, rest assured that this matter will remain entirely confidential between you and me. My advice is not to make a song and dance over it. Just don't refer to the matter again. I'm sure your wife will be all the more grateful to you.'

Keith Wilson, still exhausted after his long and dramatic speech, rose and thanked the General.

'I suppose I shan't see you again, Sir' he said, 'except officially, so I should like to say goodbye, and thank you again for what I'm sure is very sound advice.'

'Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all,' replied Manson. 'And as a matter of fact, I'm not going after all. I've had a cable cancelling my transfer.'

Keith Wilson lived only a stone's throw from Flagstaff House, so it was but a moment's drive by car. He was surprised to see the bungalow in darkness, but the boy said that the memsahib had just gone out. What he did not say or did not know was that she had gone in the direction of the polo ground.

Almost at the same moment General John Manson refilled his cigarette case, and straightened his tie, and then he too set out towards the polo ground.

Rex and Regina

A TALE OF THE PERSIAN GULF

Probably you have never heard of Rexus Island. It is only one mile broad and three long. It is rocky, barren, and unattractive to look at. Even more unattractive to live on. It stands in the Persian Gulf about mid-way between Bondai and the coast of Arabia.

For many years nobody was sure to whom the island belonged. Indeed, it seemed of no particular importance or use to anyone. Then it so happened that a British Political Officer, Rex Bonfield, who was stationed on the Gulf, was a keen sailing enthusiast. He used to take three or four days' leave when things were slack, and sail up and down the coast. Occasionally, in really good weather, he would go across and visit his fellow Political Officers living on the Arabian coast. It was during one of these expeditions that he landed first upon Rexus Island. He named it that. Not only was his own name Rex, it seemed to carry with it an unobtrusively, none-the-less British flavour. For Rex Bonfield was a man of vision. War was in the air. Not obviously but just enough for people in Government circles to realize, that suspicion might become reality within the next decade or so. War meant not only hostilities on land, but at sea. War at sea meant submarines. Submarines had to be refuelled.

AMAR SINGH COLLEGE

All this Rex turned over in his mind during long days spent sailing about the blue limpid waters of the Gulf. In due course he put his scheme up to Government, who agreed that it was a sound one.

And so it came about, nobody quite knew when, that B. I. steamers plying up and down the Gulf used to call at Rexus Island, to deliver kegs of water, fresh vegetables, and fruit, and mails for the small garrison of sailors of the Royal Indian Navy, who had the misfortune to spend six months of boredom at a time there.

Then war broke out between England and Germany. France dropped out, but Italy came in. Great Britain had her back to the wall. The Axis stirred up trouble in the Near East, and troops were despatched post-haste up the Persian Gulf to keep open the lines of communication.

The troopships all steamed past Rexus Island, which lay as unobtrusively as possible, reinforced with a double garrison, with hidden guns, and with large petrol storage tanks sunk deep into the ground.

It so happened that Rex Bonfield found himself stationed once again in the Gulf. His enthusiasm for sailing was as great as ever, and he bought a country craft with an overall length of about thirty feet, in which he had a cabin built. She was slow but seaworthy, and he called her the *Regina*.

Although it was war time, the Gulf was rather a backwater, and Rex found plenty of time to sail about in the *Regina*. Indeed, the Resident encouraged him, because the fisher-folk for many miles up and down the coast began to know him, and, by passing a generous time of day with them, he could keep his finger on the pulse of Persian public opinion, to such extent as was reflected by these primitive fisher-folk.

Rex was often hailed by the skippers of the troop carriers ferrying British and Indian units up and down the Gulf. They all knew him by sight, and he could tell each transport by name as soon as she showed over the horizon.

One day a squall began to blow up, so Rex put the *Regina* into a small cove several miles up the coast, to wait until the weather cleared again. He was sitting in the shelter of some rocks, when a couple of fishermen, father and son, came towards him. They sat down and Rex, knowing their taste, offered them a twist of the strong tobacco he carried with him for such occasions.

'Sir,' said the elder, after the usual exchange of courtesies, 'I have been fishing for many years, boy and man, but never before have I seen the like of what we encountered upon our last trip, from which we returned before dawn today.'

‘How so? What was this thing?’ asked Rex, in their own coastal dialect, far removed from the high-flown Persian used by diplomats.

‘We had made a good catch,’ said the old man, puffing at his *nargileh*, which he had filled with Rex’s tobacco. ‘It was almost full moon, and we had determined to stay out all night, returning after a further trawl at dawn, when, as you know, the fish are most easy to secure. But our boat was heavily laden. Moreover, my son, whose wife but lately presented him with a first-born—a son too, praise God, was anxious to return to his wife and child. So we brought in the nets and set sail for home. When we were still about three miles out, the moon clouded over, and we sailed on in darkness, save for the lanterns that the law bids us carry.’

The old man paused to pull at his *nargileh*, which bubbled softly in the wind.

‘Suddenly,’ he continued, ‘Hanif, my son here, who was steering, jammed the tiller hard over to port, and we swung sharply round. I could not think what he was doing, so I ran aft to where he was standing. Silently he pointed, and I saw that we were running parallel with a long low boat, the like of which I have never seen before.’

The old man ceased speaking, overcome by what he had seen, and Hanif took up the tale.

‘We so narrowly avoided a collision,’ he said, ‘that I could have touched the ship with an oar. But there was no sign of any lookout. There were no lights showing, and it might have been a dead whale, such as I saw when I was a little boy, wallowing on the surface of the water. I gained courage, and sailed round the ship. Then I eased my helm, so that our sides almost touched hers, and I brought away something to show that I had not dreamed it all. Also,’ he added shyly, ‘as a plaything for my son when he grows bigger. Wait here, Sir, and I will fetch it for you to see.’

The young man sprang up and ran along the shore, leaving the two elders to the unspoken companionship of tobacco.

In a few minutes he came back, carrying a white-painted life-belt, bearing the name *Tyrol*. Rex contemplated it in silence for some minutes before he spoke.

‘You have done well to show me this thing,’ he said. ‘Rest assured that my Government will not let it pass unnoticed. Tell no man what you have told me. This was a ship bringing harm to my people, and perhaps death to many.’

Rex thought of the laden transports, as he got to his feet, hurried to the *Regina*, and pushed off from the shore. About twelve hours ago! Rexus Island! Would he be in time? These thoughts seered through his brain.

Darkness would begin to fall in another hour or so, and the squall had died with the setting sun. Rex set the tiller in the direction of Rexus Island.

Fortunately the wind, though silent, was favourable, and in a couple of hours he judged that he must be nearing the island. There was no moon, but the stars gave enough light. Rex furled his mainsail and sailed on the jib, so that he might ride the waters unobserved. Presently he saw the dim outlines of the island rising in front of him. Lighting restrictions were naturally strictly enforced, and there was not a glimmer to be seen. Yet something struck Rex, doubly alert as he was, as not being quite normal. He ran the *Regina* in under the lee of some rocks, felt for the ledges that he knew like the back of his hand, made fast the *Regina's* painter, and leapt ashore.

Cautiously he made his way along the rocks in the direction of the building where a radio operator was always on duty. He crept close up beneath the wall, but he could hear and see nothing. All the same, he had a feeling that something was wrong. With more caution than ever, he went towards the little jetty. There, outlined against the faint horizon lay a submarine! The German *Tyrol*!

Rex froze where he stood. What was the best course of action? His first impulse was to go to the radio room and attempt to send out an S.O.S. signal before being caught. But that, he reflected, would probably be of no use except to warn the Germans that their seizure of the island was no longer a secret.

So he went back to the *Regina*, pushed off, pulled up the sail, and set his course for home.

Once arrived there, it was the work of a moment to rouse the Resident by telephone, for the Residency stands a mile or two out of the town, explain in a few brief words what had happened, and leave his chief to do the rest.

* * * *

Some weeks later a brief paragraph appeared in the Gazette of India to the effect that Mr Rex Lawless Bonfield, Indian Political Service, A.P.A., Persian Gulf, had been awarded the C.I.E. for signal services rendered to Government.

On the same day Hanif and his father celebrated the gift from the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, of a fine new fishing boat, and gave a feast to their neighbours, the wherewithal for the luscious kababs, pilaos, and sweetmeats having been presented to them by their friend, Mr Bonfield.

By a strange coincidence, a paragraph in a leading Bombay newspaper on the same day announced that Rs. 17,000 had been

collected in aid of the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund, from 14,000 visitors who had paid to see over an undamaged enemy submarine lying in Bombay harbour.

Just a Spot-light

A TALE OF KARACHI

'Ah, there are Mary and Jim; that's all of us,' said Mrs Mitchell. 'Hello, my dears,' she went on, as a pretty girl in shorts and a shirt, and with a handkerchief tied round her head, got out of the car and came towards her, followed by a young man carrying two bundles of bathing things. Newly married but a fortnight previously, these two made an ideal pair, both slim and tall and good-looking.

The picnic party, consisting of about ten young things, descended the steps of Keamari boat-basin, and settled themselves into three tomtit sailing boats belonging to the Yacht Club fleet.

Mary and Jim, by virtue of their newly married state, were allowed to go together, as a special concession, the third passenger in *Seamew* being Rob Halliday, one of Jim's brother officers, who had acted as his best man. They were in the Royal Indian Navy, these two, and could handle a boat with skilful ease, although Rob was just now attached to the Intelligence Branch, with a shore job. Jim took the tiller and Rob the mainsheet, while Mary acted as general bottle-washer and ballast.

They tacked slowly out of the boat-basin and into the main harbour, followed by the other boats carrying the rest of the party. Wind and tide were both against them; so they organized an impromptu race between the three boats. Jim showed his superior seamanship, and was, in addition, fortunate in encountering a useful breeze that carried *Seamew* far ahead of the others.

They were bound for the Oyster Rocks, a favourite picnicking spot, like a small island. Soon they left the Yacht Club and the Naval Training School, the lighthouse, and all the other familiar landmarks of Manora in their right rear, and entered the open sea. It was choppy, and there was a bit of a swell on, once they were clear of the protecting mole.

Headed for the Oyster Rocks, the *Seamew* was soon still further ahead of the others.

'Oh, look! What a bore! We shan't have the Rocks to ourselves,' said Mary, pointing to a bunch of boats riding at anchor beneath the largest rock.

Jim and Rob followed her outstretched hand.

'Look like a party of fishermen,' said Jim.

'No, just picnickers, I think,' replied Rob. 'You can't fish off that particular rock. Don't you remember that there's a wide ledge running for about twenty yards just below low water mark? It's too shallow for decent fishing there, except at the highest of high tides, and even then it isn't much use.'

'Well, I wonder what they're doing,' said Mary. 'Look at the man in the white shirt. Is he baiting his hook? Anyway, we shall be able to see better when we get a bit nearer.'

The little group on the Rock, which consisted, so far as they could see, of men only, were so engrossed in what they were doing that they did not notice the approach of the *Seamew*.

When they were about fifty yards away, Rob nudged Jim's knee.

'See what they've got?' he said almost in a whisper. 'That's a signalling lamp. Dashed odd. What the deuce can they be playing at?'

Jim did not answer. Easing the tiller until they were moving slowly but almost silently, he steered the boat nearer to the rock. The men there were intent upon some object at their feet, apparently oblivious to everything else.

'Listen, Mary,' said Jim quietly. 'There's something a bit odd here. Keep an eye on these people. I'm going to get as near as I can without their seeing us. But directly they do see us, say something, loudly and ordinarily, as if we hadn't noticed anything fishy about them. Then carry on with the usual picnic party badinage.'

Mary nodded.

Nearer and nearer they floated, until every detail on the rock was clear. Suddenly one of the men looked up, and caught sight of the boat with its three occupants, while simultaneously Mary pointed out some object to John on the far horizon, and they laughed and chatted as though completely unaware of the presence of anyone save themselves.

'Come on, let's land here,' said Jim.

They had to go a few yards along the rocks until a convenient ledge presented itself. Rob jumped ashore, followed by Mary, while Jim secured the painter. Quickly collecting their gear, they picked their way over the rocks in the direction of the suspect party already there. When they came up to them, the men were

sitting with a picnic basket open before them. Packets of sandwiches were spread out, and there was a heap of coats to one side of the group.

Jim and Mary and Rob chattered gaily, if a trifle artificially, as they went past. Clambering over the summit of the Rock, they descended on the other side and joined Mrs Mitchell and the rest of their party.

'Where on earth did you three get to?' asked Mrs Mitchell. 'We came round to the usual landing place, but there wasn't a sign of you. We thought you must have been carried out to sea! Anyway, come along now. The kettle's boiling, or will be by the time you've all had a bathe. The other girls are undressing over there, Mary, and the men on that side.'

The three merged into the rest of the group until they met again in the water.

'Mary, listen,' said Jim. 'I'm not a bit satisfied what those chaps were up to, and I want to find out. Rob is going to swim round one side of the rock, and we'll go round the other way and meet him. If the men are still there, we'll pretend that it's a bet, or something.'

Mary nodded, and they set off. But when they got there, the men had packed up their things and seemed to be about to leave. Rob and Jim and Mary acted their parts, and swam away without appearing to notice the party on the Rock.

'I'm sure there's something phoney about those chaps,' said Jim. 'I don't know what you think.'

'Yes, I'm with you every time,' said Rob. 'In time of war', he quoted sententiously, '"It is essential to leave no stone unturned, no avenue unexplored." But how? In this case, how?'

'I'll tell you what,' said Mary. 'Let's make some excuse to Mrs Mitchell, and set off for home at once. What I mean is, let's ostentatiously pass that bunder boat—ask them for a match, or anything you like, but let them know that we've left the Rock. Then we can come back tonight, or tomorrow morning, and see what's what.'

The others agreed with her plan. Saying that Jim had to go on night duty that evening, they left, and set their course for the boat-basin. The three suspects were still sitting in the same place, their food basket packed. They were smoking rather uneasily, as though killing time. Jim manoeuvred the tomtit as near as he could, with the appearance of being washed against the rock, while Rob and Mary kept up a flow of bright chatter. Then Jim steered for home, and they went off in the gathering dusk.

Just before they entered the boat-basin, Mary looked back at the Rock.

'I've got an idea,' she said. 'Let's sail back again now, making a detour out to sea, and let's land on the other side of the Rock. Then we can stalk them over the crest of the Rock, or swim round. They'll never spot us in the dark as long as we don't make a noise.'

Jim and Rob agreed with her and they reached the rock without being seen. They were all wearing rubber-soled shoes, and they made no sound as they felt their way in the darkness over the rocks that rose to a point in the centre of the little island. In a few minutes they lay flat on their stomachs at the summit, overlooking the spot where they had seen the suspicious-looking characters.

'There! They're still there!' whispered Jim.

Below them they could just make out three shadowy figures, apparently looking out to sea. They all remained motionless for some time, the three watchers up aloft hardly daring to breathe, for they were not thirty yards from their suspects. At length one of the men said something to his companions, and rose to his feet. He walked a few paces until the rocks that had hidden his view out to sea lay behind him, and he stood motionless, staring into the blackness of the night.

Suddenly Mary noticed a pin-point of light out to sea. She nudged Jim, who was nearest to her, but it had flashed off again, and neither he nor Rob saw it. But it seemed to be the signal that the watcher below was waiting for. He retraced his steps and bent over his companions. The moon had risen and was shining brightly by this time, so that Mary and Jim and Rob had to be careful to keep still, as there was little or no cover to conceal them. Suddenly, below them, a broad beam of light flashed on for an instant. Then all was darkness again. Again it happened, and again.

'Gosh! They're signalling to the shore,' said Jim, with truth, if a trifle obviously.

There were no more flashes, so the three of them wriggled back out of sight until they could whisper without the risk of being overheard.

'It's a wonder that the coast-watchers didn't spot it,' said Jim.

'Well, perhaps they did,' said Mary. 'After all, these men may only have fixed their apparatus this afternoon when we saw them at it, so they probably haven't signalled before. Only three flashes, too. They might easily have come from a fishing smack asking for assistance to find her way into the harbour.'

They waited until their quarry had packed up and pushed off all unsuspecting. Then they examined the installation on the Rock. It was so discreet as to be hardly noticeable. Merely a concrete socket in which to screw the signalling lamp.

The three waited to give the men a good start, then, they too set sail for home. The following morning Jim and Rob made their report, such as it was. But why should people take the trouble to sail out to the Oyster Rocks and signal to those whom they had just left on land? It didn't make sense. However, Rob and his "Intelligent Boys," as they were called, set their brains to work.

The following day he and four stalwarts pulled out to the Rock, concealed their boat, and, as far as possible, their persons, and waited. As dusk fell, three men appeared in a bunder boat, landed, and set up the lamp again. Rob gave a signal and quickly and quietly he and his sailors clambered over the rocks, surprised the men, overpowered them and secured them. Then they turned their attention to the lamp, which was ready for action. They flashed it on. The beam was trained exactly on to one of the silver-painted oil storage tanks, which held the oil used for refuelling the ships of the R. I. N.

Suddenly the unexpected happened. Not far away, out at sea, a gun was fired! Immediately they switched off the beam. Nothing further happened, and they made their way home, complete with prisoners.

The following morning Rob heard that one of the oil tanks had been punctured, and that many gallons of precious oil had been wasted. But only one tank had suffered, and that was fully paid for in kind. One of the newly launched Barnet trawlers built in India proved its worth within a week of being commissioned, for it located and destroyed the submarine that had fired the shot. Papers found on one of the men operating the signal proved that the plan that night had been to train the spot light on to each of the tanks in turn, thus marking the target for the gunners of the submarine. They would drill a neat hole through each tank so that the oil would either burn up or run to waste. Then they could launch a combined attack on the port, secure in the knowledge that the naval units were immobile through shortage of fuel.

Oil Sabotage

A TALE OF ABADAN

The mid-day twelve o'clock siren blew its customary blast. With one accord, the workers in the oil refining factory streamed out, pulling on their coats as they went. The Company's busses were waiting to take them to the restaurants where all the unmarried workers lunched, and by the time the three-minute wail of the siren had ceased, there was not a soul in sight.

It was Saturday, and all work had shut down until Monday morning. It was also extremely hot, for an unrelenting sun had been scorching down on the flat sandy plain since early morning.

Half-an-hour later Stephen Morton pushed his chair back with a sigh, shut the file cover at which he had been working, and took his coat off the peg. He had been finishing, in the peace and quiet of the lunch hour, an intricate calculation required by the head of his department. His bungalow was one of the nearest to the refinery, and he had warned Mollie, his wife, that he would be late, so he strolled out of his office, and walked leisurely past the cracking plant, towards the main gate.

Where was the watchman, he wondered. Bhim Singh was a tough little Gurkha, a retired Indian Army N.C.O., with a string of medals on his breast, and he always had a smart salute for Stephen, who had served for several years in the 8th Royal Hazaras, a regiment which, in Bhim Singh's opinion, was second only to his beloved 17th Gurkha Rifles. But he was nowhere to be seen.

Stephen did not stop to wonder, for the watchman's beat was a long one, and he had quite likely stepped round a corner to investigate an open door, or a banging window.

As Stephen walked past the fractionating tower, he looked idly up, his eye caught and held by three large kites or vultures hanging almost motionless in the still air above the tower. One of them came circling lower and lower, until, with a convulsive movement of its powerful wings, it alighted on the top of the tower and began tearing at some object invisible to Stephen.

'Confound it,' he thought. 'There must be a dead bird or a wild cat or something on the top of the plant. I had better take it off, or it will get into the oil, and there'll be the dickens to pay.'

He looked round again for Bhim Singh, but he was still nowhere in sight. So Stephen decided to investigate it for himself. It was important, he knew, that nothing should adulterate the oil, especially

just at the moment, for a particularly highly refined oil was being used to test a new type of small machine gun.

He took off his coat and hung it at the bottom of the ladder that led vertically up the outside of the tower. Luckily he had a tolerable head for heights, for the tower rose nearly 150 feet above the ground, although the ladder, which was just a series of iron stanchions in the sheer wall, was protected by hoops which went outside the climber.

With a premonition that all was not well, Stephen ascended swiftly and silently. When he had nearly reached the top, he paused for a few moments, for he was breathing hard, in spite of being in good training from strenuous games of polo on the sandy ground which he could see from his unaccustomed point of vantage. Being Saturday, some of the ponies were already assembled in readiness for the game, standing beneath the palm trees, with their grooms idly flicking the flies off them.

Stephen regained his breath and climbed the remaining few rungs to the top. Peering over, what he saw made him jump on to the roof of the tower and run across to the other side. There lay Bhim Singh, face-downwards, his wide-brimmed hat crumpled in the dust beside him, and a great gash in the back of his head. Stephen, with infinite care, turned him over, then gently let him lie as he had fallen. One glance was sufficient to see that he was past all aid. The vultures circled silently above.

Stephen straightened his back, and, with a characteristic gesture, rubbed the eyebrow. That there was dirty work somewhere was obvious, and somehow it seemed all the more sinister in the silent glaring light of mid-day. Then he heard a sound. It came from beneath him. Strange. There was never anyone in the works at this time of day—and it was the week-end, too. He looked carefully over the edge of the tower, all round. There was not a soul in sight. Then he tumbled to it. Somebody was *inside* the tower.

Sabotage!

'Whew!' thought Stephen. 'They're nothing if not thorough, these Nazis. To think of their getting at the oil refinery in order to prevent the manufacture of a new gun! Although, come to think of it, I suppose that the gun itself is so well guarded that it would be impossible to get at it; and even if they did, if it was tampered with, it would be surely noticed.'

But what on earth was he to do? Saturday afternoon—not a soul within call! For that matter, if anybody had been there, Stephen could not have attracted attention without warning the saboteurs below who, with one or two shrewd and well-placed

blows, could so smash the inside of the tower that it would take precious months to replace.

Stephen dared not open the trap door in the roof, through which his quarry had evidently gone, in case they were still on the top floor. So he began to climb, with infinite caution, down the ladder again, stopping every few rungs to listen. When he was about one-third of the way down, he heard faint sounds. The men were evidently working inside the tower just inside the wall, only a few inches away from him.

He had a sudden brain-wave. The plant had been working until about ten a.m. that morning, and there was probably sufficient gas left in the pipes to set the machinery working—enough to make the tower unpleasantly warm for those inside. If he opened the valves, at first only the merest fraction, gradually and noiselessly, the fumes of the petrol and oil would increase and asphyxiate the saboteurs, almost without their being aware of the fact.

Stephen climbed back on to the top of the tower and fastened the trap door securely, so that those inside could not come out. Then he almost slid down the ladder in his excitement, and went to the cocks and valves. With infinite care he turned them on. Gradually, very gradually, he opened them more and more, taking about a quarter of an hour in the process, curbing his impatience the while. Then, judging the released heat to be sufficient for his purpose, for he did not want to kill the men, only to drug them enough to render them unable to escape and to damage the plant, he turned off the valves and quietly ascended the tower again. Listening carefully, he could hear no sound from within.

Then he went to the siren and blew a strong unwavering blast, the recognized fire or danger signal. Although it was Saturday, scarcely five minutes elapsed before the fire brigade came hurtling along, with the fire engine and hose trailer, and the danger squad followed in their wake in a lorry equipped with fire-fighting tools and rescue apparatus. Stephen ran into the road-way, stopped them, and in a few brief sentences, told them what had happened.

Two of the firemen ascended the tower and opened the trap door. They waited for some minutes to allow the petrol-saturated air to escape, then, wearing gas-masks, they descended into the tower, which was pitch dark inside, for the trap-door was small. Their comrades waited—and waited. There was no movement from within. Those on the roof strained their ears.

Stephen went down with the next batch, which was four strong instead of two, and they descended with infinite caution. Stephen, muffled in his gas mask, decided that it was not good enough. In the half darkness he could see scarcely anything, so he decided to

risk asphyxiation by wrenching off his mask. Then, peering down, he saw the bodies of the two firemen lying on the floor.

Evidently the petrol fumes had not been strong enough to poison the spies. Stephen, lying on the floor, and half through the trap-door, aimed a shrewd blow with the knobkerry that was part of the fire brigade equipment, at a shadowy figure he could see lurking in a corner. It was a lucky shot, and the gas-masked figure slumped down on the ground. As it did so, a second figure came out into the middle with its arms up, in token of surrender.

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Several weeks later a terse paragraph in the Government Gazette announced that the trials carried out in connexion with the new one-man machine gun had been pronounced entirely successful.

Picnic for Two

A TALE OF KARACHI

Jock Blakeway's car rattled along the Napier Mole Road in the direction of Karachi's dockland, and came to rest at Patel Mansions. This is the great office block which lay derelict until the outbreak of war, when the owner cabled an offer to Government of the use of the building, rent free, for the duration of the war. Government installed therein the Navy Office.

It was about half-past seven on a warm summer's evening, when Jock, immaculate in his white starched naval uniform, slammed the door of his car and ran upstairs, two at a time, to the top floor. He leaned over the verandah rail, rather regretful at the thought of the tennis party he had left at the Club. However, he thought, war is war. He went along the short passage into his office, whistling cheerily, and 'took over' from Tom Scott, who had been on duty by the telephone since early morning, in case important cyphers came in.

'Here you are, my lad,' said Tom. 'Keys of the safe, cypher book inside, and a special sealed envelope the Old Man put in with his own hands. Said we'd got to be extra careful of it—secret orders, or plans, or information, or something. I'm off, thank goodness; got a date with Betsy.'

'Lucky devil!' grinned Jock. 'I've just been playing tennis with her. She told me she was sailing over to Sandspit with a moonlight picnic party.'

'Picnic party my foot!' said Tom. 'We're going over, just the two of us. Sailing over in *Babette*. Well, bye-bye, old boy. See you tomorrow.'

Jock made himself comfortable for the evening. He unrolled his valise upon the waiting camp bed, placed the telephone within easy reach, and opened a bottle of beer with which he had come armed. Modified lighting restrictions were in force, and he could either have the windows open and sit in the dark, or amuse himself with the windows hermetically sealed, the panes pasted over with brown paper. He wrote a couple of letters, ate the modest sandwiches he had brought for his dinner, read for about an hour, then examined the lock of the safe before turning in.

An hour or two later he woke up with a start, all his senses immediately alert, and he turned on his electric torch. He was alone in the room. He dashed out into the passage, and still saw no one. Some sixth sense warned him that something was up, so he closed the windows, and, switching on the lights, made a thorough search. Everything seemed to be in apple-pie order.

Finally, he took the keys of the safe, found the correct combination on the lock, and opened it. The envelope with its impressive seals was there, as well as the cypher book. Laughing at himself for a suspicious fool, he was about to swing back the heavy safe door when he felt a crashing blow on the back of his head.

* * * *

Betsy rolled lazily over on the sand, wound the gramophone, and changed the record. Silently she and Tom heard it through, and then, as if by common consent, they allowed the machine to run down as they listened to the waves gently breaking on the shelving beach below them.

'Let's go and hunt turtles,' suggested Betsy, and they got up, linked arms, and sauntered along the shore. 'I've never seen a turtle laying its eggs, have you, Tom? I should love to find one tonight.'

Not long afterwards they came to a cumbersome double track leading from the water's edge to the sand-dunes, with such regular marks that it looked almost as if a motor tractor had emerged from the sea.

'There's one!' said Tom.

Cautiously they followed the tracks into the sand-dunes, and watched the turtle first scratching a deep nest with her clumsy flippers, then laying her eggs, and finally covering them with a foot or more of sand, before slithering with surprising speed back to the water.

So absorbed had Betsy and Tom been in watching her that they had lost all sense of time. Suddenly Tom said,

'Gosh! The tide! I'd forgotten all about it! The dinghy'll be high and dry by midnight. Hope to goodness it's not as late as that, or we're stranded here.'

Neither of them had a watch, but they scrambled quickly back to where they had picnicked, gathered up their things, and hurried over the spur of sand that hid the dinghy from sight. She lay heeled over, several feet above the water-line.

'That's torn it!' said Tom. 'I must be in the office by eight o'clock tomorrow morning, because the Old Man wants to see me about something. The tide won't be up again for hours, and it's no use pushing *Babette* into the water. You know what the creek is—even at high tide there's only a couple of feet to spare. I've tested it with a paddle dozens of times.'

'Father wouldn't be too pleased, to say the least of it, at my spending an entire night with you, unchaperoned,' observed Betsy. 'It's not the sort of thing a "nice" girl did in his young day. But I'll tell you what. We'll have to walk along the shore to Manora, and take the first launch back to Keamari. It goes at about 4 a.m., I think, to take the cooks over in time for the morning market.'

Some slight explanation is necessary to give the geography of Karachi harbour. Inside the harbour, creeks and mud flats extend for several miles, so that although it is possible to reach Manora headland at the mouth of the harbour by land, it means miles of walking across sand and mud. Sandspit lies like a firm isthmus some eight miles along the coast from Manora, and is always approached by sailing boats or launches steering directly across the harbour.

But walking to Manora seemed to be the obvious solution, so the two of them set off on their eight mile tramp.

It was a perfect moonlit night, with a clear sky. The waves scarcely more than whispered, as they broke gently on the firm sand. Betsy and Tom had gone about half-way, when the stern outlines of Marsh Fort imposed upon the low skyline, hitherto filled only by undulating sand-dunes.

'How old is Marsh Fort?' asked Betsy, her voice lowered almost to a whisper in keeping with the stillness of the night. 'Does it date from the days when Sind was a separate kingdom? Rather fun to think we're walking past a place where the Sindhis defied the conquering English, sailing up from Bombay.'

'No, as a matter of fact, it's far more recent than that. It was built during the last war, and afterwards it was just allowed to lapse. I've often come for picnics here. You can sail a dinghy

up the creek from the harbour and the battlements afford quite good shade. It evidently wasn't considered worth while even selling the guns for scrap iron, because they were just dismantled and chucked on to the sand.'

'It sounds rather an exciting place,' said Betsy. 'I wish we had time to explore it now. Will you bring me another time?'

She walked along looking at the outlines of the fort, when suddenly Tom caught her arm, and motioned to her to make no noise. Softly he drew her behind a low sand-dune, and they squatted silently down, almost beneath the walls of the fort itself.

Tom gave Betsy a nudge. A little way in front of them, and above, a light was steadily flashing, obviously sending a message out to sea. They strained their eyes, but even the bright moonlight revealed no answer. There was nothing but sparkling moonlit water.

Betsy felt a movement beside her, and saw Tom take off his white shirt.

'Stay here,' he whispered. 'I'm going to creep in behind the fort and see if I can get the signaller. You keep a good look-out for an answer or anything else coming from the sea. If you see anything, you've got to leg it as fast as ever you can to Manora and tell them what's happening.'

'But.....' began Betsy.

'Shut up, and do as you're told ;' whispered Tom fiercely, and Betsy was thrilled to see him no longer as an amusing playmate but as the resolute man of action he was reputed to be.

Silently he faded into the shadows, and although Betsy strained her eyes seawards, she neither saw nor heard anything until Tom crept up beside her again. His hair was ruffled, and he was breathing fast. In his hand he clasped a large important-looking envelope crusted with seals.

'I settled him!' he said delightedly. 'I dotted him two with a brick and then trussed him up with my shirt. It would take him some time to get free even if I hadn't knocked him out. I'm a bit worried about Jock, though. See this envelope? Last time I saw it, it was in the safe in the Navy Office. The Old Man put it there himself yesterday. Said it was something pretty special. My trussed-up friend must have laid Jock out and then fiddled about with the safe until he opened it. But look here! We mustn't stay talking! I'm going to stay here and watch over my prisoner, and also see if any of his pals rise out of the sea. There've been several rumours of Italian submarines up the Gulf, you know. So off with you! Go to the R. I. N. Cadet Training

College, rake out the officer on duty, and tell him to get in touch with the Old Man.'

Breathlessly Betsy started off on the remaining few miles to Manora. The wires were set humming, fast launches skimmed up the harbour, and a strong party of naval ratings soon reached Marsh Fort. Nothing had happened. Tom was still watching over his unconscious prisoner, and he had had no visitation from the sea.

* * * *

Two or three days later a fleet of closed and heavily guarded lorries might be seen wending their way from Keamari to the Internment Camp beyond the race-course. Arrived at their destination, the lorry doors were opened, and out stepped a number of officers and men in the uniform of the Italian navy.

The Mali's Son

A TALE OF CALCUTTA

The telephone rang, and John's voice came over the wire.

'Is that you, Joanna? I've got some news for you. How'd you like to be transferred to Calcutta?'

How would I like.....? Gosh! Wouldn't I, just! Calcutta, after Danbipur! It seemed too good to be true. When? Why? But John was too busy to go into details, so I had to possess my soul in patience.

Calcutta! It sounded like heaven. I knew it would be hot, with very little winter, and that it would be expensive. But we had spent six years in Danbipur, where we had literally not one single solitary neighbour nearer than fifteen miles.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, we arrived in Calcutta, stayed at one of the less grand, and therefore less ruinous hotels, and began flat-hunting. We knew that a house would be out of the question, and as the children were in England, the lack of a garden would not really matter, although I loved grubbing myself.

Alas! Rents, although we had expected them to be high, were even more exorbitant than we had feared, and search as we would, we could find nothing within our purse that was in any way suitable.

One afternoon, I took what I hoped was a short cut from Park Street, back to the hotel. Although my sense of direction was

good, I did not know the streets, so I turned into a narrow road, little more than a lane, hoping that it would lead near to our hotel which was in Lawrence Lane.

A couple of hundred yards along it, a narrow gully, barely wide enough to take a car, led off at right angles, and at the entrance, a notice said,

'House to let. Low rent. Apply Mali.'

In I went.

The gully turned a sharp corner, and tumbledown gates partly barred the entrance to the house, in front of which lay the usual circular lawn with exceptionally well-kept flower-beds round the edge. An old Mali was squatting on the grass, weeding.

I called him, and he stood up, a tall gaunt figure.

'Mali!' I said, 'May I see this house? Is it really to let?'

'Yes, Memsahib, it is.'

He looked at me, as if trying to sum me up.

'What is the rent, Mali?'

He mumbled something that I did not catch, and again I got the impression that he did not want to commit himself before he knew more about me. However, he fumbled in his dhoti for the keys of the bungalow.

We entered, and the house seemed to be just what we wanted. It was old-fashioned, and the rooms were large and high, with shabby walls and floors, but these were minor disadvantages. We went upstairs, where there was one large room with a bathroom, and a similar suite about half the size. On the way downstairs I noticed a door on the half-way landing.

'What is in there, Mali?' I asked.

'Oh, nothing, Memsahib. It is just a godown. It is not worth Memsahib's while to see inside. Bearer will use it for his cleaning things.'

He tried to shepherd me past the door, but I felt that for this pleasant house to have been obviously so long empty, there must be a catch somewhere, and perhaps this was it. It could not be faulty drainage, nor wiring, for neither modern sanitation nor electricity was installed.

'Please let me look, Mali, I could not take the house without seeing everything, and I think I should like to take it.'

He gave me a long searching look that in anybody less venerable would have been impertinent.

'Very well, Memsahib, you shall see.'

He unlocked the door and pushed it open. There was no window, and my eyes took a few moments to get used to the darkness. Then I saw that it was a small low chamber, only about

ten by six feet, and that the centre of the floor was occupied by a white-washed tomb, upon which lay a few fresh blossoms. I turned to the old man for an explanation.

'This was my son, Memsahib,' he said. 'He was a good boy, and he was devoted to the Chota Sahib, who was born here, and who lived here with his parents. My son loved Johnnie Sahib—that was Chota Sahib's name—and they were allowed to play together. My son learned lessons with Johnnie Sahib every morning, and afterwards they would run into the garden, shouting and laughing.

'One morning I was drawing water at the back of the house, when I heard them running into the garden as usual. Then Johnnie Sahib came to me, white-faced and frightened.

"Mali," he said, "Your son....He lies on the ground so still. He will not speak to me. Tell him to speak to me. Tell him, tell him to get up and run and play with me again," and Johnnie Sahib burst out crying.

'I ran to the garden, and on the spot where that mango tree now stands—I planted it myself soon afterwards—lay my son. Tightly clasped in his hand was a dead kreit.

"He called to me to go away because he was playing with a snake," wept Johnnie Sahib.

'My son was quite dead, and he had given his life to save Johnnie Sahib.'

The old man's voice faltered, and his eyes grew dim. Then he cleared his throat and continued:

'Memsahib saw us from her bedroom window and ran down.

"Carry your son into the house, Mali," she said. "Sahib's camp bed is in the staircase room. Lay him there."

'I did as Memsahib said, and a servant was sent running for the doctor, but when he came, he shook his head. My son was past all aid. My wife was dead, and now I had no one, no one. I fell ill with a fever, and when I knew not what I said, I implored them to bury my son where he lay in this little room. But now I am sorry. Sahibs, when they see the tomb, do not like it, and the house has remained empty for many years. It belongs now to Johnnie Sahib, who allows me to stay on to tend the garden, to look after my boy's tomb, and to act as watchman, but I fear he has lost much money through my ravings.

'But you, Memsahib, you will have no fear? You will come to live here? You are kind. I can feel it, and the house will be happy once again. The rent is not high, I know, for so many grand new houses have been built that nobody will pay much for this one, especially with the tomb here.'

He named a sum so moderate that my mind was made up instantly. We had found our Calcutta house.

As soon as possible we moved in and engaged servants. They did their work well, and we were quite satisfied with them, but one after another they made some excuse and left. Although none of them would ever admit it, it must have been the presence of the tomb about which they were superstitious. Finally the old Mali came to the rescue, and offered to produce a couple of indoor servants. Thankfully we accepted his offer, and although they both appeared to be somewhat decrepit specimens, their references were good, and it seemed to be a case of engaging them or nobody. The wages they asked did not seem unduly high, and after a day or two of settling in, the household appeared to run smoothly enough.

One evening we had the few people we knew in for drinks, by way of a small house-warming party, and also to return the hospitality shown to us when we had been staying in the hotel. The servants coped as well as we could expect, and we went back to pot-luck with some of the guests. I was tired, so we did not stay long after dinner, and we walked back the short distance to our house.

'The servants must have gone without clearing up properly,' I said, as we went up the drive, for the house was in pitch darkness, and the debris from a cocktail party always takes some time to clear up; washing glasses, plates and ash-trays; straightening furniture, patting cushions, and sweeping away the cigarette ash and cocktail sticks that people so often throw on to the floor.

But I was surprised to find that the drawing-room was in perfect order. Moreover, there was no trace in the atmosphere of stale smoke and alcohol. I congratulated the servants the following morning, but they only smiled sheepishly and said nothing.

The house continued to be well-kept and we congratulated ourselves upon our good fortune. Then the monsoon broke, all the more fiercely because it came late. About fifty yards separated the servants' quarters from the house, and I used to see the poor old servants getting soaked when they went from one to the other in spite of the umbrellas with which I provided them. So I was not surprised, although I was dismayed, when one day they failed to put in an appearance, and the Mali reported that they were both ill with fever.

'But never fear, Memsahib,' he said. 'I cannot work in the garden while it rains, so with your permission I will come indoors and help you.'

I thankfully accepted his help; amateur though it would be. To my surprise everything ran as smoothly as before. The silver

was immaculately kept, the flower bowls were replenished, and the washing-up seemed to be finished as soon as my back was turned.

I could not understand it. Then one morning we came down to breakfast, and the whole time we were in the dining-room I could hear the Mali arranging flowers in the verandah. Immediately afterwards I went upstairs to make the beds. To my astonishment they had been made!

'Mali'! I called. 'Mali! You haven't been upstairs since I came down to breakfast, have you?'

'No, Memsahib,' he answered.

'Then.....' I began, visions of thieves flashing through my mind.

To my surprise the old man sank down and salaamed me, his forehead nearly touching the floor.

'Forgive me, Memsahib,' he said. 'I had hoped that you would not notice in case it alarmed you. It is my son, my son who died, who does these things. He was such a good boy, and he has not left me, a poor widower, alone and forlorn, even after death. In gratitude for being allowed to remain in his little tomb within the house, he delights to assist in the work of the house servants. Forgive me, forgive him, O Memsahib!'

What was there for me to say?

The Trust of the 17th Foot

A TALE OF LUCKNOW

Not far along the Lucknow-Cawnpore road, on the left-hand side there stands a tiny house, built of those small flat bricks which have long ago ceased to be made, and wearing an air of general decay. The yellow stucco, ornamented here and there with traces of green, has in many places been chipped away to show the mellow brick beneath. A narrow path bordered by a high, sweet-smelling hedge leads to the steps of the spacious entrance of the house, which stands upon a plinth, and has but one room. Opposite to the entrance, another door gives on to a semi-circular platform which looks on to a sad, overgrown garden, surrounded by a dilapidated wall, against whose sides the rubbish of decades has been shot on to dank shapeless heaps.

A few months ago Geoffrey Vachell, a young officer in a British cavalry regiment, was returning from a long week-end shooting

trip in the Unao district. Sport had been poor, and he gave vent to his feelings in no uncertain language when his car spluttered once or twice, choked, and finally died on him altogether. He climbed stiffly out, and lifted the bonnet, but his knowledge of the inner workings was insufficient, and he could only push the car to the side of the road with the help of his shikari.

In the rapidly deepening twilight, he could see little save great trees bordering sparse crops a few inches high, but the shikari elicited from the occupant of a passing bullock cart that there was a little house a few yards down on the other side of the road. Thither they went, carrying with them such essentials as Geoffrey had taken with him on his shoot.

Stumbling along the dusty narrow path, doubly darkened by the over-grown hedges, and up the broken steps, Geoffrey was surprised to find the door swinging open. Lighting his camp lantern he surveyed the single room. It was clean and sparsely furnished after the manner of a roadside rest house, but though they shouted loud and long, the place appeared devoid of inhabitants, and no chowkidar appeared. The shikari, however, coaxed a small fire to burn, in the miraculous way of a woodman, and produced a meal that was at least hot, if not particularly satisfying.

Geoffrey laid his valise on the iron bedstead and turned in for the night, while the shikari rolled himself in a blanket on the floor. In a few minutes both were lost in a healthy sleep born of physical tiredness.

At about three in the morning Geoffrey awoke to find the moon, somewhat past its full, shining on his face. He turned over and shut his eyes, but there was no escape from its pale radiance. However, that comfortable drowsiness which so often induces further sleep was again stealing upon him, and his eyes were closed, when his senses were jerked into alertness. A shadow had passed over the moon. Not the slow gradual shadow of a cloud, but an instant's eclipse, as though somebody had walked across his line of vision.

He opened his eyes and sat up.

Somebody had !

At the foot of his bed, having entered by way of the front door, stood two men, soldiers evidently, but in curious old-fashioned uniforms.

Each wore a black tricorn hat edged with white, and a scarlet knee-length coat, whose edges were caught back to show a grey lining. Beneath was a long scarlet waistcoat, edged with royal blue braid, and beneath again, a pair of scarlet breeches, reaching only to above the knee, where they were met by long grey leggings, strapped with black. Over the coat, which was heavily frogged

with gold and royal blue, was a heavy gilt cross-belt, into which was stuck a dagger and a pistol. Each man carried a long-barrelled musket. As Geoffrey looked, one man marched to the head of the bed, and both stood sentinel as if guarding the occupant.

Geoffrey sat up and asked what they wanted. Both saluted smartly but said nothing, and about-turning, they marched out by the garden door.

The shikari had awakened too, and although neither he nor Geoffrey felt any sense of fear, neither slept again until dawn broke an hour or two later, while Geoffrey lay puzzling over the curious dress worn by the visitors.

When it was fully light, they made a thorough search, but even the highly-trained eyes of the shikari could find no trace of foot-steps other than their own up the dusty path, neither in front of the house nor behind it.

But hidden behind a thick creeper, and half buried under piles of rubbish, in a corner of the garden they found the remains of two graves, still protected by crumbling masonry and broken bricks.

By the light of day, Geoffrey discovered that the cause of his breakdown was simple — lack of petrol; so he borrowed some from a passing bus and returned to Lucknow.

There he made enquiries, and found that long ago, nearly two hundred years before, two British soldiers of the 17th Foot had been murdered in the little house whilst mounting guard over their officers. Description of their dress tallied exactly with that worn by the men he had seen, and it is more than probable that no Englishman had slept there since that fateful night. When Geoffrey fell asleep, the soldiers returned to guard him, departing when he awakened, and was able to defend himself against foes which for them had proved all too subtle.

Pictorial Evidence

A TALE OF FATEHPUR SIKRI

Instead of mounting the broad steps leading to the Gate of Victory at the Palace of Fatehpur Sikri, near Agra, they decided first to visit the well, where the men make their famous jumps from various terrifying heights.

'Ask them how much they want,' said Bob.

They bargained briskly for some minutes. The younger performers eventually decided to accept two annas each for their display, which, indeed, was little out of the ordinary; but the expert, who jumped from the top of the wall of the palace courtyard, demanded a whole rupee for himself alone.

'Hold on a minute,' said Bob, who was a keen photographer. 'I'm going to get a picture. Coming, Jenny?'

Together the two of them raced up the main steps. They hailed an ancient gentleman who produced a key to the padlock locking the door of the stairs leading to the roof. Bob and Jenny climbed up the deep uneven stone steps, some winding round a pillar, some connecting one small strip of roof with another, and one rising almost perpendicularly into the sky. At last, breathless and panting, they emerged upon a flat roof shaded by turrets, and it was obvious that they could go no higher.

They made their way to the edge overlooking the tank and Jenny, who had prided herself on having a good head for heights until that moment, lay face downwards and wormed her way forward until she could hold her camera in the required position. Bob was made of sterner stuff, and stood perilously near the edge, straddled across two stone beams, his camera glued to his eye.

He gave a shout, as a signal to Charles and Maurice, who constituted the rest of the party. They had decided that discretion was the better part of valour. In any case, having no cameras, they preferred to watch the diving in comfort from ground level. They signalled to the star performer, who stood poised upon the serrated edge of the roof, silhouetted against the sky.

All faces, white and brown, were turned skywards as he spread his arms, balanced and leapt feet first into the water two hundred feet below. He hit the water with a resounding crack, and the thick green scum covering the surface broke into a thousand pieces. He disappeared for several seconds before making the surface again.

Bob and Jenny clicked their cameras simultaneously, and then withdrew to perches of greater safety and wiped their heated brows.

'Gosh! I shall never get my breath back,' said Jenny, who was still panting. 'I can't think what the photo I took will be like. I was heaving and gasping, and probably I never got the diver into the picture at all. I was far too frightened to make absolutely certain that my lens was pointing in the right direction. Anyway, you're sure to have got it much better than me, Bob, so that it doesn't really matter. And now that I have climbed to these colossal heights, I'm going to take a panorama, and loose off several other shots. I shall never have the energy to come up

here again, even if we ever do revisit Fathepur Sikri, which is doubtful, if the petrol ration keeps on being reduced. '

She stood up, adjusted her camera, and systematically took photos all round the horizon, finishing up with some bird's-eye views of the interior of the courtyard lying far below.

Then, a good deal slower than they had climbed up, she and Bob made their way down again to join Charles and Maurice.

'That was a swell dive, wasn't it?' said Charles. 'I think we got rather a better view of it than you did. The height he stood at looked simply terrific from where we were, almost at water level. '

'Anyway, let's look at the rest of the place now we're here,' said Maurice, who was an inveterate sight-seer.

They made a tour of the stables, the broad court-yard with an ancient shady tree growing in the centre, and sitting beneath it the inevitable holy man, and they turned again towards the Gate of Victory. They all gazed out over the Turkish bath-houses with their collection of domed roofs bubbling down the slope below them; and across to the shattered walls that once enclosed a fine city; a city thronged with citizens, with water-tanks and houses, barracks and bazaars. Suddenly their eyes were attracted by a movement at the far side of the ancient walls.

'A train, by gum,' said Bob. 'Well, if that doesn't seem like sacrilege, a modern steel railroad running slap across the ancient city, of the Emperor Akbar. It was the Emperor Akbar, wasn't it?' he asked Charles, who was clasping a guide-book in true tourist-fashion.

'Uh-uh', answered Charles, who was gazing at the train, as it slowly made its way across the tumbled ruins of the sixteenth century fortified town.

Slowly they all crossed the broad outer courtyard and descended the steps. They walked over to the car and sat on the running-board, drinking a welcome bottle of beer after the exertions of the morning.

Jenny and Bob, the more irresponsible members of the party, began clambering over the bath-house roofs, photographing each other in various postures; while Maurice and Charles lingered over their beer and cigarettes.

'Odd, these trains coming through here in such numbers,' said Maurice, as another lengthy monster followed hard on the heels of the first. 'They seem to be carrying loads of stone. What on earth for, I wonder. '

'Oh, it's some specially good kind of gypsum that is used in plaster of Paris, I expect. The industry has had a tremendous

boom since war broke out, as the Government medical services are buying up great quantities. '

' I didn't know that gypsum was found in these parts,' said Maurice.

' Yes, the firm I was with in peace time did a tremendous trade in it, even then,' said Charles. ' We supplied the whole of India, and used to export a certain amount as well. Let's stroll down and have a look at the wagons as they go by. '

They did so, and Charles commented upon the excellent quality of the stone in question. Then he took a closer look at one of the trucks, ran beside it as it slowly lumbered along, and picked up a fragment of stone that had fallen on an outer ledge.

' Just have a look at this,' he said, showing it to Maurice.

But Maurice could see nothing special about the lump of stone in Charles' hand. It was, perhaps of a darker colour than some of the other pieces gliding past him in the long wagon train, but not in particularly marked contrast.

' But my dear chap, look again ! ' insisted Charles. ' Look at the texture of it. It's hard and flint-like, and totally unlike the gypsum. The large lumps of stone look soft and deceiving, but the small particles of which it is made up are almost like diamonds. They are so hard. If this sort of stone is allowed to get mixed up with the gypsum when it is prepared for the plaster of Paris, no end of harm will happen. When the plaster is moistened to set a limb, this stone, even if there is only a very small quantity present, will work its way through the gypsum until it touches the limb, and it will be apt to set up inflammation. Being inside the plaster cast it is not noticeable except by the wretched patient. The doctors would probably suspect him of making a fuss if he complained of pain, and usually they insist upon leaving the cast in place for its full number of weeks or months as prescribed by the surgeon in charge of the case. By that time the harm would be done, and the limb would probably have to be amputated. I know, because a consignment we once shipped from northern Iraq—it is quarried near Mosul in large quantities—was found to have this black stuff—blustrug, it is called, in quite a small percentage, but the whole consignment had to be scrapped. '

' But is it often found near the real gypsum ? ' asked Maurice.

' Well, sometimes, so the quarry overseer is supposed to be on the outlook to spot it. But when we found it in the Mosul consignment, some sort of sabotage was suspected. Usually the workmen know their job, and if they see what they think is blustrug, they draw attention to it. It looks to me as if some dirty work is going on here, too. '

'Why d'you think so?' asked Maurice.

'Well, look at this piece in my hand. You can see that the edges haven't been freshly cut. It doesn't come from this quarry at all, in my opinion. I wish another train would come along.'

But the traffic seemed to have ceased for the time being, and Charles and Maurice strolled back towards the car to rejoin Bob and Jenny, who were wrangling amicably over the respective merits of their exposure metres.

'I say, you chaps, we ought to be thinking of getting back,' said Bob. 'It'll take at least an hour to motor back to Agra, and we want to have time for a decent hot bath and dinner before seeing the jolly old Taj by moonlight.'

* * * *

Three or four days later, back in Delhi, the four of them were poring over Jenny's and Bob's photos. Bob had secured two beauties of the divers, but Jenny's showed nothing save distant scenery and sky. Her panorama of the surrounding country was, however, most successful. Charles was glancing at the finished product, cut and glued together. It showed the whole of the vast town ruins, enclosed by a ragged wall, and, cutting sharply through the centre, the railway line. Suddenly Charles bent closer, and called Maurice to look.

'I say, old man,' he said. 'Just come and have a look at this.'

He passed the photograph to Maurice, and pointed to the lower half of the picture. Maurice took up a magnifying glass and peered at the photo.

'It looks like the figure of a man,' he said, 'with a sack over his shoulder.'

'It is, my dear chap, it is! Of course it is!' said Charles. 'But don't you realize the significance of it? He's walking towards the train. I'll bet any money you like that there's blustrug in that sack he's carrying, and he's sabotaging the gypsum.'

Together they pored over the photograph.

'Better get a big enlargement made before we say anything, to make quite sure,' suggested Maurice. 'Then we can report it to somebody; the C.I.D. or the military authorities.'

They duly obtained a full-plate enlargement, the negatives being sharp enough to stand it, and there, plainly visible, was the figure of a man carrying a small sack over his shoulder, and walking towards the open trucks as they lumbered by, laden with gypsum.

Charles and Maurice reported the matter, although with some diffidence, for the evidence of sabotage was, they felt, vague. Charles supported it with his commercial knowledge, which, he felt, saved the report from verging on the fantastic.

A few days later, in the Gazette of India, there appeared a short paragraph which, except to those few in the know, had no connexion with this story. It read as follows:

'The Government of India announced that Rudolph von Broderich, of alien nationality, was shot as a spy, following an order-in-council signed by His Excellency the Viceroy.'

Too Simple to be True

A TALE OF CALCUTTA

Jessica applied her brakes as the lights across Chowringhee turned to amber and then to red. They had worked out well, as they so often did, and Margaret, who was waiting on the curb, ran across and jumped in beside Jessica.

'Morning, Jessica. Lucky again,' Margaret observed, mopping her face which, even at that early hour, was showing slight ravages of the heat of a Calcutta summer.

The lights changed again, and they drove on through Chowringhee Square, down Central Avenue, until they parked outside the Censor's office.

'Anything much doing in your section these days?' asked Jessica as they went upstairs.

'No-o-o, not much. I've got one thing that's a bit of a problem, although I'm probably making a mountain out of nothing. I think I'll see the Chief about it.'

A sea mail had recently come in, so there was plenty to do, and the various sections soon settled down to a steady routine.

Colonel Hartwell, the Chief Censor, spent half an hour dictating letters to his secretary, when a tap at the door interrupted him. Margaret entered with an open letter in her hand.

'Good morning, Colonel Hartwell,' she said. 'May I disturb you for a few minutes? I've got a letter I should like to ask you about. I may be barking up the wrong tree, but it's the ninth I've opened from the same source—from a man living in Asansol, and he always writes in English to a friend in Unoccupied France—nothing much, just news about his family and what he is doing, and he doesn't write very often. But I've noticed in all the letters some figures below the typist's initials. Of course it may be a reference number for filing, but I don't think so, because sometimes they make a lower total than the time before. I've kept a record

of all of them except the first lot. Here's the latest letter I opened yesterday, and here's a list of the numbers.'

Colonel Hartwell listened attentively. Margaret Delamere was one of his star censors—quick, capable, and reliable, and he was inclined to believe in her hunches. She had already had several ideas which had led to fruition.

He took the papers that Margaret handed to him. The first was a sheet on which were written the following figures.

4311

2871

919

964

2711

The letter was typewritten, with a private letterhead, and there were the numbers 2711 below the usual initials of the writer and his stenographer.

'MY DEAR GEORGE,' it began.

'I must apologize for not having written for some time, but I have been pretty busy one way and another—business has been looking up a bit; my wife and I again took the kids to the sea for a week. I've been rehearsing a couple of radio plays at the Calcutta station—one of them based on some of Robert Burns' poems. I was lucky in picking up a nice little edition with a foreword by Neil Munro. It's a pity you can't get A.I.R. on your set, or you might have listened in. Read the poems, anyway. They're grand stuff. It's no use commenting on the war news because it is bound to be thoroughly out of date by the time this reaches you. I'm going off on long leave this week, so I shan't be writing again.

All the best, old boy. We'll be seeing you one day.

Yours ever,

JOHN BUCKLEY.'

'Thank you, Miss Delamare. I'll keep this, if I may, and I'll show it to our cipher expert.'

Several days later Colonel Hartwell called Margaret into his room.

'Your hunch was quite right, Miss Delamare,' he said. 'I turned the thing over to Ciphers, and he found out that a chap named John Buckley had left Asansol on long leave a few days ago, but that he has no wife or children, and went on a solitary trek down the coast. The police traced him as far as Gopalpur, and there he completely disappeared. He told the hotel that he was going for a moonlight stroll along the shore, but he never came back. What they did find, however, was a fisherman who says he can

swear to seeing a long grey ship floating on the water several nights ago when he was on his way back from a fishing expedition. He says that men from the boat called to him and bought some fish from him and paid him in silver rupees. When he was almost in shore, he passed a collapsible rowing boat going in the direction of the big one—which, I think, disposes of Mr Buckley.'

Margaret listened intently, thrilled at the story. But Colonel Hartwell had not finished.

'And now about the figures. Ciphers thinks that he's solved them too. It all hangs on the edition of Burns that Buckley talks about. And it's too easy. In fact, it seems so simple that the cipher department is inclined to smell a rat. The numbers refer to the page, the line, and the letter, and, with the exception of the missing first one, spell "Oenig". And if the first letter isn't a "K," I'll eat my bottom dollar. Now they're combing Calcutta for a bloke named Koenig. Remember that talk from A.I.R., Delhi the other day, on whether there is a secret pro-Nazi transmitter in India? Of course the chap said there wasn't, but as a matter of fact, the espionage service is beginning to think that there is one, after all.'

Margaret went back to her desk in a fever of excitement. This was worthy of the best Edgar Wallace tradition. Koenig! Koenig! If only she could unravel the problem herself!

At length the lunch-hour came. Margaret had the afternoon off for her weekly appointment with the hair-dresser. The girl who did her hair was deft and neat-fingered, her only fault being a tendency to chatter. Margaret always provided herself with a book, which she firmly opened before any conversation had a chance to get under way.

She opened her book as usual, and was tucked away under the electric drier. Whew! How hot it was! Even with the table fan going she felt nearly stifled. She bore it for about half an hour, and then, being convinced that her hair must be dry, she took her head out of the drier and was just going to call the assistant to come and comb out her hair, when she overheard the girl, who was evidently well embarked upon one of her interminable narratives, saying:

'.....and such a noise as the neighbours in the flat upstairs make. They must be rich—King, the name is, although they don't seem English to me. As I was saying, they must be rich because they've got ever such a powerful radio set. When they have it on ours won't work at all. Not that you can hear theirs. They have it turned on quite soft, but we asked Mr King about it once, and he says it's got so many valves, or something, that it attracts

all the electricity in the house. I must say, though, they're quite good about it really—only turn it on late at night usually when we're out or have gone to bed. There! Is that net comfortable, Madam? I'll bring the drier from Miss Delamare. She must be dry by now."

Margaret's head was in a whirl. For once she closed her book.

'Where do you live?' she asked the assistant. 'For weeks I've been meaning to send some flowers to your mother, and I can do it this afternoon.'

The girl told her. Margaret stopped at a convenient florist's shop and despatched a generous bunch, before making an unexpected re-entry into her office.

The following week she deliberately omitted to take a book with her to the hair-dresser's.

The assistant needed no prompting. Without an invitation she embarked upon a long monologue,

'.....and would you believe it, Miss Delamare, them Kings—King, me foot! Their right name was Kenik, or some such word—German for King, I've heard it was. When they saw a police van drive up the street—me and me sister Violet was leaning over the verandah-like, so we saw it stop outside—they kicked up such a shindy, breaking the furniture, it sounded like, and then there was a smell of burning. Of course the police sergeant wouldn't let us upstairs into their flat, though we asked ever so nicely. But he told us that they were spies all right! Did you ever hear the like of it, Miss Delamare? Don't you wish you was me, right in the middle of a real drama?'

The Tiger's Eye

A TALE OF JUBBULPORE

MY DEAR MOTHER,

I said that after a few days, when I'd settled down, I'd try to give you a picture of some of the people who are sharing the Mess with me.

It so happens that all but the Headquarter Wing of the battalion are out on manoeuvres, so there aren't many people in Cantonments. Alec Baltimore I've already told you about. He is very pleasant to stay with, and knows his stuff. We seem able to get through a good deal of the instruction business in private conversation, which I find much pleasanter than the normal way, and it seems to stay in

my mind better. I'm extremely lucky, because his wife is away, and as the Mess quarters are all shut for repairs, or plumbing, or something, Alec has asked me to live with him until the Mess re-opens properly.

Another of the regular officers at present in Mess is a Captain called Rogers, a typical works overseer (which he was), who has an exceedingly bad manner with the men. Not a nice chap.

To give you an idea of him, I must tell you what happened the other night. Alec had him to dinner, really, I think, with the idea of my getting acquainted with him, and he began telling us, in rather a boasting strain, which I gather is characteristic, of various shooting and sporting episodes, in which he always came out in the most favourable light.

Most of his stories were about small game shooting. I asked him if he had ever bagged a tiger. He said, Oh, yes, he'd shot a big one, quite a record for several seasons. I thought I noticed a smile flit over Alec's face, but he pushed the liqueur brandy round, and Rogers obviously settled down to enjoy telling his story.

'We were stationed in Jubbulpore,' he began. 'It was a grand station in those days; the sort of place where the shikari would come and tell you after morning parade that there was news of a "kill" about twenty-five or thirty miles out, and you'd tell your bearer to make the usual *bandobust*. Then you'd start off after lunch, and be back by sundown with a tiger stretched on the back seat of the car.'

'How many tigers did you bag?' I asked.

Rogers seemed to hesitate for an instant.

'Only one,' he answered. 'I was only at Jubbulpore for a few months before I left the army and took up a civil job.'

'Do tell us about that one,' I said, glancing at Alec, and again I thought I saw the ghost of a smile flit over his face.

'Yes, do, Rogers,' he said, and again Rogers seemed to hesitate for a split second before he began.

'Well,' he said, 'I will if you really want me to. It's quite an interesting story really. About six of us, all subalterns, used to pay an old shikari a monthly wage, and his job was to bring news of forest activity whenever he heard of any. Usually one or other of us could get the afternoon off, and, if necessary, we could usually wangle leave to be away overnight. We would take it in turns to receive news from the old shikari.'

'One morning I had come in from a T.E.W.T., or some such exercise, rather hot and tired. The shikari was waiting for me, and he told me of a kill that had been made by a tiger, quite a big brute he thought he must be.'

'Apparently the tiger had dragged the buffalo nearly two hundred yards from where it had been tied up not far from its owner's hut. He had eaten a little, and then roughly scrabbled some dead leaves over the carcass before going off to sleep for the day. If, suggested the shikari, I could start before lunch instead of after, I could reach the spot, where some coolies were already busy constructing a machan in a convenient tree, in plenty of time to make all my preparations for sitting over the kill to await the tiger's return. The shikari was convinced that he was a fine large brute, worth taking trouble over.

'Luckily I caught the C.O. as he was going off parade, and he gave me leave until the following morning. He liked his officers to be keen shikaris. He thought it was good for us.

'So I made all the preparations I could think of, and set off in a ramshackle old car that several of us shared, and that was mainly used for just such expeditions as the one on which I was starting. I was delayed for an hour by some urgent work that came into the office, so I was a bit late, and scrambled into the car without checking over the paraphernalia. My bearer was always good in preparing everything, and I didn't want to waste any more time, so we set off.

'The kill lay in the direction of Nagpur, through that lovely country that Kipling has so often described, but we didn't have to go as far as the Council Rock. Instead, we turned off down a narrow lane running at right angles from the main road. The jungle looked at its best. It was not too hot. There was a nice breeze whisking the leaves into play, and a pleasant dappling of light and shade in the more open groves. After motoring down a rough track for about three miles, we came to a village, and there some men were waiting for us, to show us the exact spot.

'After a short parley we began to get the things out of the back of the car. I noticed my bearer searching furiously among the cluttering of torches, knives, sticks, and other equipment, and then he turned to me with a crestfallen face.

'“The Sahib's best gun is not with us,” he said.

'And it was true. The fellow had forgotten it. All I had was a .22, a silly little thing that I used to practise pot shots at empty bottles with, in the garden. I was furious with the bearer, but I cursed myself, too, for not seeing that everything I needed was in the car before we started. What were we to do? It was too late to think of going back to fetch it, and to return the next night. It looked as if my tiger was a gonner. Then the shikari came to the rescue.

'“I have a very old gun, Sahib,” he said. “But it shoots straight and true, and I have killed many a tiger with it. I always

take it, as perhaps the sahib has observed, when I accompany the Sahibs to their machans, in case I need to use it in a hurry. But if the Sahib chooses, I shall be honoured for him to take my gun, and I will arm myself with the Sahib's small gun. Great things have sometimes been accomplished with small weapons."

' Gladly I accepted the old man's offer. His gun was ancient in the extreme, it is true, but still, it was a gun, and I could but try to shoot with it. It was worth having a pot at the tiger instead of going tamely home because I had been careless enough to forget my essential equipment.

' So we set forth. The guide led us through forest footpaths twisting this way and that, and at length we entered a shallow nullah. We had to exercise especial caution here, because the bottom of the nullah was thick with dry leaves, that crackled when we trod on them. And as you may know, in the jungle even the breaking of a twig may scare away the very animal you wish to leave undisturbed until the last minute before the beaters arouse him from his sleep, and drive him, all unsuspecting, on to the guns.

' So, with infinite caution, we picked our way along the nullah, which formed a fine natural ride in the forest, an open space through which one could see the game being driven towards one in the beat. But this time of course, it was not a question of beating, but of sitting over the kill. About a couple of hundred yards along, a villager who had been sitting waiting for us suddenly rose to his feet. He was so much one with the forest colouring that I hadn't seen him until we were right on top of him. In silence he beckoned us to a sturdy tree, against which a rude ladder was leaning. Then he and the shikari held a short whispered conference. Leaving our goods and chattels at the foot of the tree, the three of us crept as near as we dared to a clump of bushes. Beneath the nearest one lay the remains of a buffalo calf. I could barely see the wound, and there was quantities more food for the tiger, and thus every hope that he would return.

' As silently as we had crept up, we retreated. The shikari and I made our preparations, climbed up the ladder, which was then taken away, and settled ourselves, with infinite care to make no noise, in the machan. Gradually evening fell. I had taken a book with me, but the small sights and sounds of the jungle kept me interested, and the hours passed quickly enough until it was quite dark. It is then that one begins to think of stiffening limbs, cramped by being so long in one position, yet not daring to move more than necessary in case of inadvertently making a noise.

' The moon began to come up, and I strained my eyes and ears. You know how one does, when the light is not very good; thinking

that one sees a movement here, something there, and hears a sound there, until the whole forest seems alive.

'At last, after an hour or two of these false alarms, I began unconsciously to relax, and I was dozing lightly when a touch on the shoulder from the shikari put all my senses on the alert again. The moon was at its height, and a fortunate moonbeam was cast full on the dead buffalo. Gradually, into the path of the light I saw a paw, followed by a stripy head. I held my fire in order to get a really good target. In a few minutes the tiger crept into full view, as he tore at the buffalo flesh. I raised the shikari's gun.

'I took aim and fired. With a roar the tiger gave one bound into the air, galloped about ten feet along the nullah, and fell without a sound. The shikari had raised his rifle at the same time as I fired, but of course with the little .22 he could not expect any result.

'We had to wait until dawn broke, to descend from the machan, in case the tiger's mate was anywhere about, and in case he himself was not dead. But when we did venture to approach him, he was dead as a doornail, and, what is more, I had shot him clean through the eye.

'If you'd like to, what about strolling over to my quarters now, and having a look at his skin? I've got it stretched on the wall.'

I was eager to see this monster among tigers, so we went.

Sure enough the tiger was a whopper, a finely marked specimen, and evidently in the prime of life when he was killed.

'You see?' said Rogers, proudly. 'There's not a hole in the skin anywhere—shot right through the eye.'

It struck me that his voice had taken on an aggressive blustering note, as though to ward off any challenge that might be made. We stayed and had a drink with him before we walked home to bed.

'Curious chap, Rogers,' I said to Alec, rather hoping to draw his opinion, as I had gathered that he did not like Rogers, although he had not said so in so many words.

'Yes,' said Alec shortly. He hesitated, evidently thought twice about what he was going to say, and then he said:

'Well, old man, we've known each other for many years, and I don't see why I shouldn't point out to you what I saw for myself. Next time you have a chance to examine that tiger skin, look at it more closely. You'll see that the eyes are both quite perfect. I don't mean the actual eyes, because those are glass, of course. But there couldn't possibly have been a shot through one of them without singeing the hair around, as Rogers would know if he was anything of a real sportsman. But what there is, exactly where the heart would be, is a small hole drilled through the skin,

and so neatly repaired that unless you were looking for it, you wouldn't spot it. I had suspected something of the kind, when I looked for the damage that should have been round the eye, and sure enough, there it was. That tiger was shot through the heart by a .22.'

So long, Mother. I'll describe some of the other folks in this joint in my next. Must dash off now.

Your loving son.

A Ferocious Expression

A TALE OF KARACHI

Alec kicked off his shoes with a sigh, undressed as quickly as he could, put on his pyjamas, and rolled into bed. Ten past five! Heavens, he was tired! But the evening's fun had been worth it. He had been at the War Fund Ball, dancing, doing the round of the sideshows, supping, sampling the various bars, and dancing again, all with Vivienne. What fun they had had! But everything was good fun with Vivienne. She was pretty, vivacious, and amusing, and always ready for anything.

Half-smiling at some of the jokes they had had during the evening, Alec was just falling asleep, when the telephone rang.

Prrr-prr! Prrr-prr! Prrr-prr!

Drat the thing! Let it ring! And let it ring he did, for several minutes. Then he sat up in bed with a start, and reached for the instrument, which was plugged in beside his bed.

'What? Yes, yes! MacDonald here! What, now? At 5.45? Good Heavens, I've only just got to bed! Yes, all right, I'll be there on the dot.'

He replaced the receiver, ran his hands through his hair, and shouted for his bearer, who fortunately lived on the premises.

'Mahommed Din. *Ao! Jeldi ao! Ham parade per jate hain.*'

The mechanized squadron of the Coastal Light Horse had been warned several days before that a surprise parade would be sprung upon them at short notice, when there would be an exercise in the dock area. Hastily Alec shaved, and dressed in his trooper's uniform, which fortunately did not take long to adjust. Mahomed Din rolled up in a rug Alec's shaving and washing tackle, and the change of clothing, and some 'iron' rations, as laid down in Orders.

Alec glanced at his watch.

'Heavens! Twenty-five to six! It will take me all my time to get to Headquarters. Here, Mahomed Din! Bundle those things into the car. I'll put on my puttees as we go. The driver can drive for once.'

Alec had recently taken possession of a new Ford V8 station waggon, and was running it in himself with all the careful owner's pride in a new acquisition.

They arrived at Auxiliary Force Headquarters on the stroke of a quarter to six, just as Alec had hurriedly fixed his second puttee.

He fell in to get his orders, and found that he was detailed to drive the precious station waggon, taking with him three other fellows of his section. The orders were to approach the seaplane basin by the reclaimed mole road until they reached the entrance gates, then to abandon cars and make a mock attack upon the Airoads Company's buildings, where, in normal times, overseas passengers disembarked.

Alec's section, consisting of eight men in two cars, was detailed to go somewhat further than the rest of the company. Indeed, they were the spearhead, as it were, of the whole scheme. Their instructions were to drive the cars about half a mile further than the terminus for the others, to conceal them beneath a conveniently placed clump of trees, and to work their way on foot to the very point of the spit of land upon which the Airoads buildings stood.

Thus the plan was that they would come upon the 'enemy' in the rear, and, eventually, by skilful manoeuvring on the part of the section commander, Johnnie Kemp, link up again with their own side.

Alec and the other driver parked their cars, and the eight men began advancing on foot, each carrying a rifle, and some rounds of blank in their ammunition pouches. Alec found it as difficult to put some semblance of reality into concealing his advance as he did in attempting not to relax into a grin when trying to cultivate a 'ferocious expression', as commanded by the sergeant in charge of bayonet practice.

Johnnie Kemp took the outermost position, with Alec next to him. They spread out fanwise, and began crawling towards their objective. At first there was little cover of which they could take advantage, but as they advanced, the tufts of camel thorn grew larger, and attempts had been made to plant a cactus hedge, presumably to prevent the sand drifting into the Airoads enclosure.

The highest building of the group formed their immediate objective. This contained the Airoads offices and passengers'

waiting rooms, while a high roof jutted out on the water-front, with platforms at intervals up the sides. Here the flying boats were wound up by a massive chain from the slipway, for overhauling. This water-frontage was concealed from all members of the section except Johnnie and Alec, who had unconsciously worked their way rather further round than, perhaps, they should have done.

A good many troop movements were being carried out just then, and the authorities were making full use of the Airoads seaplane basins wherever the routes happened to coincide. One big troop-carrying machine was hauled up for repairs, another lay high and dry on the slipway, while no less than three more rode at anchor in the bay, only a few yards from the shore.

Alec noticed two mechanics at work on the repairing platforms, round the uppermost seaplane, but there seemed to be no activity in connexion with any of the others.

Then he saw a small collapsible dinghy nosing its way towards the slipway, keeping under the lee of the shore. It would not have attracted his attention, save that one of the two occupants, in attempting to pick something off the bottom, over-reached himself, and the dinghy nearly capsized. The other man grabbed wildly at the side of the boat with one hand and flung the other arm up in an attempt to balance himself. In that hastily up-flung hand Alec saw, to his astonishment, a revolver! Strange. And then, across the water, where the slightest sound travels and is magnified, came a guttural oath.

Alec looked across at Johnnie, who was only a few yards away on his right. He had also been struck by the sight of the revolver and the sound of the oath. Signing to Alec to follow him, he struck out a new line of approach. In a few moments they had reached the cover of some outhouses. There they straightened up from the cramped crawling positions in which they had approached from the cars.

'Did you see that fellow's revolver?' asked Johnnie. 'I don't much like the look of him myself, nor of his dinghy. If that's not a continental type of dinghy I'll eat my hat!'

'Yes, did you hear his exclamation, too?' said Alec. 'Didn't sound like a good honest British oath to me.'

'Well,' said Johnnie thoughtfully, 'what makes it all a bit odd is that at the section commanders' conference yesterday we were told that for a couple of hours this morning from six to eight the Coastal Light Horse could have free run of the Airoads area. It isn't even seven o'clock, yet, so what are these boys doing here? Anyway, come on and let's have a look at 'em.'

He and Alec bent down again, and this time Alec found no difficulty in making a show of reality. He glanced to his left rear, but the other members of the section were half a mile away beyond the far boundary of the Airoads compound. In a few moments they wormed their way to within a few yards of the shore. The dinghy was about to land at the slipway. Swiftly Johnnie outlined a plan. Alec nodded, and left his companion. He crawled through the coarse grass, and between the sand-dunes, until he reached an angle of the main Airoads buildings. Then he straightened up and walked inside. Swiftly and silently he climbed the spiral staircase that led to the repair platforms. He unslung his rifle, pushed open the swing door, and stepped outside.

'Hands up, or I fire,' he barked, inwardly wishing that the drill sergeant could see his expression which, he felt sure, left nothing to be desired, from the ferocity standard.

The two men working on the machine had been so intent upon their jobs that they were taken totally by surprise. One was busy with the engine situated upon the port wing, while the other was bending over the instrument panel in the forward cabin.

They instinctively jerked up their hands, however, with amazed expressions on their faces.

'Come along now, quickly, and no nonsense!' ordered Alec.

The two men clambered obediently on to the platform. One of them seemed to contemplate escape by dropping to the ground, but the platform was thirty feet high, and the ground below was paved with stone. Moreover, marching up from the slipway, hands held high, and obviously in charge of another armed soldier, came their two companions.

Quietly they did as Alec bid them, and descended inside the Airoads offices, and out to join their comrades. Johnnie and Alec, however, kept their respective captives well apart, taking no chances, and marched them along the entrance driveway, and towards the mole road. Alec saw that besides the rifle which, did their prisoners but know it, was unloaded, Johnnie carried the revolver which he had seen brandished from the dinghy.

Eventually the strange little procession encountered a platoon of regulars, and the prisoners were handed over to the proper authorities. Examination of the seaplane proved that the altitude metre had been tampered with, while the petrol feed of one of the engines had been sawn through and patched up with putty, so that it would last for a quarter of an hour or so before giving way. The men admitted, in a searching cross-examination, that they had been landed upon deserted coast further north, and had made their

way down, with orders to sabotage as many troop-carrying aeroplanes as they could.

Johnnie and Alec decided to call it a day. Leaving the rest of the section to find their own way home as best they might, they drove to the Club, clattered up the steps in their unfamiliar ammunition boots, and each drained a bottle of beer.

'Anyway,' said Alec, 'That sergeant doesn't know what he's talking about! A ferocious expression doesn't have to be cultivated. It just comes naturally!'

Just Luck

A TALE OF CALCUTTA

'Mario Marignolli has been captured, but his companion, Raymondo Pallibocchia, is still at large. When re-taken, Marignolli was wearing a yellow shirt and a dhoti, and it is thought that Pallibocchia may have obtained similar clothing. He speaks English, and it is thought that he is making for Calcutta. And now, in a few moments, over for the news.'

The occupants of the tea-shop stirred uneasily and looked suspiciously at one another. Many of them were regular frequenters of this tea-shop, but every evening casual customers were apt to look in. Although they nearly all wore *dhotis*, nobody sported a *yellow shirt*, so they all relaxed again.

Presently, a man sitting in the corner called for his reckoning, paid it, and left, walking leisurely along Dharamtalla Street. He reached Chowringhee, crossed it, and found a spot near one of the tanks on the maidan. There he lay down on his back, hands clasped behind his head, and gazed at the pattern of flaming gul-mohur petals etched against the sky.

'What's the next move?' he queried to himself. 'Change these accursed clothes, I suppose. Damn Mario! It was careless of him to be caught, and it nearly meant the end of my run for my money, too. If I hadn't been mighty quick, and jumped that lorry....'

Raymondo sighed. He and Mario had planned their escape from the prison camp with infinite care, and just because, when Mario stubbed his bare toe on a stone, he swore in Italian, and a police sergeant happened to hear him, all their careful timing and arrangements had been upset. The steamer upon which they had arranged to stow away must have sailed by now.

Raymondo sighed again and closed his eyes. He was tired. He had come a long way ; everyday citizens, as well as the police, had been warned to look out for him. He slept.

* * * *

He was awakened by a man who was obviously in charge of a number of youths who had come to play football.

' Hey, *dhobi* ! What d'you mean by spreading all your clothes to dry on our games ground ? Be off with you ! No, no ! Fool ! Pick up your bundle and go !'

In a flash Raymondo realized that here was an excellent means of changing his garb. Playing the part of a disgruntled *dhobi* as best he might, he made a large bundle of the rough-dried linen, heaved it on his shoulder, and trudged off.

So far, so good. What was the next move ? An ideal place to examine in detail his new-found possessions would be one of the numerous slit trenches dug all round the maidan, but he did not know how strict the police were, regarding unauthorized occupancy, and he had no desire to draw any attention to himself.

So he trudged, with the unwieldy bundle over his shoulder, to the far end of the maidan, where he chose a secluded spot, and opened it up. He was in luck. He chose a pair of white duck trousers and an unobtrusively striped shirt, which he put on with the tail hanging outside in the approved fashion. With the large white pagri he already wore, he flattered himself that he looked exactly as thousands of others looked, as they thronged Calcutta's streets. He had plenty of money, but he had still not solved the question of where to go, of how to escape from India.

A passing urchin on a bicycle gave him an idea. He would steal a bicycle, make for the North-West Frontier, and then somehow find his way into Afghanistan. Glad to have decided upon a plan of action, he got up, tried to look as if he had no connexion with the bundle of washing, and walked off briskly in the direction of Park Street. There he slowed down his pace and pretended to look at the displays of furniture in the shop windows, until he came to some smaller shops, where the sidewalk was roofed over in an arcade, with archways supported by pillars on the edge of the pavement.

This seemed an ideal spot for his project. He leant idly against one of the pillars and waited. Five minutes later a man rode up on a bicycle and propped it against a pillar. Raymondo gave a hasty glance round, but a police sergeant was just driving by on his motor-cycle, with its scarlet side-car. By the time he had gone by, Raymondo was afraid that the owner of the bicycle would come out of the shop again. He could afford to wait.

He moved away from the gutter to the inside of the arcade. No sooner had he done so than a uniformed peon rode up, propped his bicycle against the curb, and went into a shop. Raymondo straightened himself, and with as confident an air of ownership as he could assume, strode towards the machine, mounted and rode off as fast as he could, turning off out of sight down the first available side street.

When he had put a mile or two between himself and Park Street, he breathed more freely and began to think of direction. He made for Howrah Bridge, crossed it, and stopped at a tea-shop for a light meal before turning off on to the Grand Trunk Road.

As he left the shop, having paid his modest reckoning, and was about to ride off, a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. Almost before he had time to realize what was happening, a police sepoy had dextrously handcuffed him, attaching the other half to his own wrist, and a Sergeant-Inspector was leading him gently but firmly into a waiting police van. Try as he would, Raymondo could discover no explanation of his capture. His respect for British law and order grew large.

* * * *

'Tiny' Carruthers entered his chief's office.

'Yes, we nabbed him just over Howrah Bridge, Sir.'

'Well done, Carruthers! Smart piece of work. Congratulate your men!'

'Thank you, Sir.'

Carruthers saluted smartly and went back to his own office, where the Sergeant-Inspector was waiting for him.

'The Chief's falling over himself with praise,' observed Carruthers. 'Have a cigarette, Mason?'

They exchanged matches.

'Damn lucky thing', Carruthers said, between efforts at lighting his cigarette under the fan, 'that the chap picked on your *dhobi* to steal his clothes from!'

✓ The Terror of the Tomb

A TALE OF LUCKNOW

The house referred to is that of the Deputy Commissioner. A former resident told me that although he himself had seen no sign of ghostly activities, the room is, in fact, reputed to be haunted.

'What does Kothi Nur Bakhsh mean?' asked Peter Oldfield, as he helped himself to a drink. 'And why is your house called that?'

'Light-Giving House,' replied his host. 'But I've never been able to discover why. They usually had some pretty good reason for names in those days, though. It was built well over a hundred years ago. Figured in the Mutiny, too. Stoutly built, and I fancy it's come in for some pretty rough treatment.'

Peter glanced casually at the solid walls of the verandah before he reluctantly got out of his chair.

'Well, I must be getting along, old man, and find a place to sleep. So long. I'll be back soon if all the pubs are full, and you'll have to let me sleep on a sofa, or somewhere.'

Arthur North saw him to his car, and Peter drove off in the direction of the principal hotel. Until a few months ago he had been stationed in Lucknow, but the Powers That Be had sent him on special duty out in the district, and he had been camping by himself until he began to feel that he could bear it no longer. Army Cup Week was in full swing, when his camp happened to be within motoring distance of the town, so he flung a suitcase into the car and drove off. It so happened that the population of Lucknow had changed even more rapidly than usual that winter, and the only people he knew well enough to invite himself to stay with were the Norths. They, however, in common with everyone else, had a full house for the Race Week, but Peter felt the party spirit upon him, and he was determined to stay somehow.

But at one hotel after another he drew a blank, and he was forced to return to the Norths.

'I'm fearfully sorry, Marcella, but there simply isn't a corner in the whole of Lucknow,' he said on his return. 'Could you be a dear and lend me Arthur's camp bed? I've got my bedding, and I can easily manage in that lumber room of yours between Arthur's study and the dining room.'

'Well, I will if you like, Peter,' said Marcella. 'But you know that's the room with a tomb in, don't you? I wouldn't sleep there if you paid me.'

'A tomb?' said Peter. 'How very odd. Whose?'

'I don't know. Some Muhammedan's. People still come and put marigolds on it sometimes, and the servants always keep a tiny oil lamp alight in front of it at night.'

'Well, I'm afraid that whoever it is will have to put up with a room-mate to-night,' said Peter. 'I'm sorry to be such a nuisance, but now I'm here, I simply must stay and see a spot of life. I feel as though I've been buried alive for years.'

That evening they all went to a cabaret dance at the Chutter Manzil Club. It was not a very late show, and they were back in their drawing-room soon after midnight, having a last drink before turning in. Peter was tired after his long drive and the unaccustomed late night, and he jumped into bed without a glance at the tomb, which stood between him and the door, in the middle of the room. It was the usual white-washed rectangular tomb, humped in the centre, and with a head-stone and no sort of inscription. At the foot stood a little earthenware saucer half-filled with oil, in which lay a wick burning with a tiny flickering flame. There was a faint scent of marigolds.

Peter tossed restlessly once or twice and lay quiet.

After some time he realized that he was still awake without knowing why. He did not move, however, hoping to drop off, and too sleepy to open his eyes. Gradually an over-powering smell of burning oil assailed his nostrils, and he remembered where he was. He tried to open his eyes, but found to his horror that he could not! He realized with a start that they were firmly bandaged.

He put up his hands to tear off the wrapping, but at that moment his shoulders were roughly seized and pinned where he lay. His hands were caught and held in a vice, and a heavy weight fell across his knees and ankles, rendering him powerless to move. All this without a sound.

After a few ineffectual struggles, Peter lay still and tried to hear something besides his own wildly beating heart.

Deathly silence, while the smell of oil grew stronger and more pungent. Mingled with it was a damp unwholesome current of air which eddied about his nostrils. He tried to move his shoulders, but the vice which gripped them grew tighter, and he realized that he was pinioned by the strongest pair of hands he had ever encountered. Each finger dug into his flesh. Beneath the bandage wrapped about his eyes the sweat felt cold and clammy and trickled down behind his ears.

Not a sound from his captors. They could not possibly have been in the room when he was undressing, because it was empty save for his bed, a table upon which stood his suitcase, and the tomb.

Ah! The tomb!

'My God, what's that?'

A series of cracks sounded in his ear, intensified by the deathly silence of everything else, and by the clinging darkness in which he lay.

The tomb!

The damp foul air grew stronger until it seemed to blow directly into his face and up his nostrils, and sickened him with its filthy stench.

A louder crack than before was followed by dead silence—a silence crowded with *something*—but what? Peter's senses were incapable of helping him.

His nerves tautened again as softly, softly, something came dragging over the floor towards him.

A shriek died to a gurgle in his parched throat as a *Thing*, slimy and indescribable in its loathsome substance, passed over his chin, mouth and nose, and finally reached his hair, leaving in its path a thick coating of filth. The *Thing* flopped over the head of the bed and dragged itself with painful slowness to the corner of the room where the table stood.

For a time all was still.

Then, from the corner came a deep groan, and at the same time a bell began to toll somewhere outside.

Dong! Dong!

The sound reverberated round the room, quivering in the cold night air, with an unearthly quality of agony.

Peter's ice-cold limbs grew colder and more rigid as the door burst open and a chill damp wind stirred the blanket on his bed.

He tried to shriek, but the filthy slime left by the *Thing* had hardened like a mask over his face, and he could not open his mouth. From the distance came the tramp of many feet drawing near, until they halted at the door. There was a dragging shuffling sound of unseen people removing their shoes in reverence, which struck on Peter's overwrought nerves until he felt his throat must burst with the pulse drumming against it.

Then he became aware of hundreds of bare feet padding past him, always coming from behind his head and passing on without a pause. For hours this went on, until he was almost numbed into forgetfulness. Suddenly he realized that the procession had ceased, and another deep groan from the same direction as before recalled all his uncanny sensations with a jerk.

Plop!

Something soft fell off the table.

God!

It was the *Thing* coming back!

He could not, oh, he could not bear it passing its filthy substance over his face again.

With a supreme effort he forced one shoulder upwards and wrenched his hands from the pinions which held them. At the same moment, by the mercy of Providence, the camp bed broke

and collapsed on the floor. His legs were thus suddenly released, and stumbling barefoot over he knew not what, he groped his way to the open door and fled through the passage to the porch, and out into the drive, tearing at the bandage covering his eyes as he did so.

Numbed as his hands were, he could not release the bandage, but he stumbled on, heedless of everything but to get away—anywhere—as long as it put distance between him and that ghastly presence in the room.

Presently he stopped in his headlong flight and managed to tear off the bandage covering his eyes. His hands had passed over his face in his efforts to remove the wrappings, and when he caught sight of them he retched and was suddenly, violently sick. Then he seized the wrappings and scrubbed at his face and neck until he rubbed the skin off, before casting the bandages from him, and running again, running as though he could never put enough distance between him and that unknown creature behind him.

He lost all sense of time and direction, and jogged on and on until he realized that he was sobbing with pain and that his bare feet were scratched and bleeding. He stopped and sat down at the side of the road.

What was that?

He tried to struggle up, but his knees gave way beneath his weight. Before him a dull red glow was spreading, growing brighter and brighter until it hurt his eyes with its hard brilliance. In the foreground, standing black and gaunt, silhouetted against the light, was the Nur Bakhsh, the Light-Giving House. It looked like a giant funeral pyre, blazing sullenly into the night, and wafted across to him came the smell of burning oil.

In the darkness and in his frenzy, Peter had run in circles, and he was but a few hundred yards from the scene of his horror. Fascinated by the glare, like a moth by a candle, he continued to stare at it until gradually it died away into the inky blackness of the night, while from the East came the first glimmerings of the dawn. With the suddenness of fatigue born of fear, Peter lay where he was, and slept.

He awoke to broad daylight, to find a little group of curious urchins solemnly regarding him. He sat up and winced with pain, and a glance at his torn and swollen feet brought back the terrors of the night. Beckoning to one of the boys, he told him to go to the Nur Bakhsh Kothi and call his bearer. The boy ran off and in a few minutes the Norths' butler came hurrying out.

'Bearer not here, Sahib. Bearer not staying last night. He say he not stay. Went to brother's house in Chauk, and not come back. Not good Sahib sleeping in that room,' he went on, with a

glance at Peter's feet. 'I fetching Sahib's car and clothes, and Sahib bathing-dressing at Club. Not coming back to North Sahib's house.'

He was as good as his word, and Peter drove away, the horror of the night still upon him.

He wrote a note to Arthur North from the Club, saying that an urgent wire had recalled him, before he started to put miles between himself and the slimy creeping horrible *Thing*.

When he reached his camp his bearer was awaiting him. No amount of questioning could drag from him what he knew about the Kothi Nur Bakhsh, nor why he had refused to stay there, and although the Norths repeatedly invited Peter to stay with them, he always made some excuse, for nothing on earth, he felt, would ever make him enter that house again.

A Shaft of Moonlight

A STORY OF GANESHKHIND

Mary turned over restlessly as the head-lights of the car swung on to her bed in the verandah, and the slam of the car doors roused her. But she only half woke up, for she knew subconsciously that it was her parents returning from an 'official' dinner party.

She slept, but she was woken again about twenty minutes later by the sound of her father's voice at the other end of the verandah. The house was an old one, with a continuous wide low-roofed verandah all round, but she could not hear what her father was saying, because the drawing-room bulged out into a porch in the centre, and broke the sound.

Mary turned over on her other side and shut her eyes resolutely, but it was no good. Her father's voice rasped on and on. There were pauses, during which she supposed her mother replied, but Mrs Morrison was inside her bedroom, while Mr Morrison was presumably smoking a last cigarette on the verandah.

On and on, querulous and complaining, sometimes hectoring, sometimes questioning, and never a congenial note in his voice.

Mary sighed. She was wide awake now. Father was in a temper. That meant a bad day tomorrow. He would be Mr Purdey. She and her Mother referred to Father as Mr Purdey

when he had one of his bad moods on. The name dated from the time when Mary had acted in 'The Sport of Kings,' a play in which Mr Purdey was apt to send his family to Coventry, communicating with them only by means of written instructions.

At length the voice ceased, but Mary could not sleep. Her mind ranged over her life since she had left school and come to India. She loved being in India; the riding, the games, the dancing; and the parties. If only Father would be more reasonable with Mother. She would like him to be more lenient with herself, of course, although it was not so important as that he should be nice to Mother. Still, she would like to be allowed to call her boy friends by their christian names, like other girls did, instead of 'Mr' So-and-So. Ronnie, for instance. Her face relaxed into a smile when she thought of Ronnie. It was so ridiculous, when they loved each other, to have to say 'Mr Thompson', and 'Miss Morrison', and to write stiff unnatural little notes to each other. They didn't when they were by themselves, of course. Ronnie called her 'Mary-mine,' and she called him, quite simply, 'Boy'. Oh, joy! She'd see him tomorrow evening at the Government House dance at Ganeshkhind. She was going to wear her new organdie dress with the full skirt, and a particularly intriguing hair ornament. Gradually, with rosy thoughts for the morrow, she forgot the reason she had been awakened, and she fell asleep.

The next morning, half-awake, Mary knew that something was wrong, but for a moment she could not remember what. Suddenly it flashed upon her mind. Mr Purdey!

At breakfast time it was only too apparent that Father was Mr Purdey at his worst. Nothing that she or Mother or the servants could do was right, and Mr Morrison's voice rasped on and on, complaining and finding fault. Thank goodness he went to the office at nine o'clock and did not come home for lunch! Mary and her mother were good friends, and would have a pleasantly undisturbed day together. In the evening some people were coming to dinner before going on to the dance. The day died. 'Mr Purdey' was the same as ever, and the dinner party passed off as artificially but as pleasantly as these affairs usually do.

Government House was looking lovely in the full moon, with coloured lights festooning the trees, and flood-lighting cunningly inserted around the fountains. Mary deposited her wrap in the cloak-room, glanced in the mirror, and rejoined the rest of the party, who were busily booking dances. She and Ronnie had arranged theirs, the one before, the one during, and the one after supper, so the rest of her programme was free for her dinner guests, and for some subalterns who clustered round immediately she made her appearance.

She smiled at Ronnie over her partners' shoulders once or twice, and the first few dances seemed to drag. At last it was the one before supper. She and Ronnie danced a few times round the room, and then wandered out into the garden.

What a perfect night! They strolled across the terrace, on to the lawns, and then down the yew walk at the end of the gardens. Here the illuminations ceased, and they walked slowly up and down, hand in hand, scarcely talking, content with the beauty of the evening and the fact that they were together, and together alone, without need of the camouflage of indifference, and of 'Mr Thompson', and 'Miss Morrison'.

The melodies of the dance band floated softly out, then a burst of clapping, and the music struck up again, a rumba this time, while a few couples began drifting out into the garden.

Mary and Ronnie strolled slowly up and down. Another couple came into the walk and sat down on the stone seat at the end. A shaft of moonlight fell on them, catching the silver sequins sparkling on the girl's blue frock, and sending little pin points of light into the darkness around.

'Look, Boy,' said Mary. 'They look like a picture on the dust cover of a book, don't they?'

She and Ronnie gazed fascinated at the distant picture, framed in dark shadowed yew, save where a shaft of moonlight fell upon their faces like a cameo.

'Don't let's go in for supper, Mary-mine,' said Ronnie suddenly. 'You don't want anything to eat just now, do you? Let's wait till those two have gone, and sit there ourselves. It's a picture I shall always remember, just you and me, only our two heads illuminated, and the rest of us shut out, like the world, in darkness.'

Just then the band started to play for the supper dance, and the man and the girl in blue, who had all unconsciously been playing a part for Mary and Ronnie, left the yew walk and went towards the ball-room. Ronnie and Mary, still linking hands, went to the seat and sat there, laughing at one another as they sat with their head illuminated in the moonlight, and everything else in shadow.

Suddenly Ronnie grew grave. He got up abruptly, walked away for a few steps, then swung round, and came back to the seat. He put one foot on it, rested his elbow on his knee, and tilted Mary's chin with his finger, until she looked up into his eyes.

'Mary-mine,' he began. 'You know what I'm going to say, don't you? That I love you. Do you love me? No—no, don't answer'—as a light-hearted affirmative began to bubble from Mary's lips. 'I mean *really* love me, soberly, having thought

about it, and what it means. I shan't ever have much money, and I don't suppose that you will either. I don't care what people say, but money *does* make a difference. But if we really love each other, we'll come through all right. Mary-mine! Answer me now, quickly! No, don't! Think about it first. Oh! But I can't wait. Mary-mine, Mary-mine, will you marry me?'

Mary, in obedience to Ronnie's guiding finger, looked at him all the time that he was speaking. Now she dropped her eyes and studied Ronnie's foot in its Wellington boot and tightly strapped mess overalls, as it rested on the seat beside her. Somehow it seemed to stand for all that Ronnie was, all that she loved in him—strong and dependable, upright, and good. Good. That was it. It sounded priggish, but she didn't mean it that way. Ronnie was not asking her to marry him just because he was in love with how she looked framed in a moonbeam. He really loved her, and would go on loving her, even when they were poor and when, perhaps, he could not afford any pretty dresses for her. She took a deep breath, raised her head, and looked at him.

'Yes, Boy,' she said simply. 'I do love you. I know I do. And I want to be married to you. We shall be happy together and—and—contented. That's the word. Contented! Quietly happy, and not bothering about anybody else. Boy—I love you, Boy!'

Ronnie dropped on to the seat beside her and kissed her. He grasped her gently by the shoulders and kissed her again; deeply, slowly, thoughtfully, as though he never wished to stop.

* * * * *

Mr Morrison took his partner into the supper room, found a table, deposited her there, and elbowed his way towards the laden buffet table in search of food. He had procured plates of sausage and mash, and was waiting to be supplied with knives and forks, when a girl in a blue dress sewn with sequins jogged his elbow, so that he nearly upset the plates he was carrying.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, before she could turn round in the crush. 'Oh! It's you, Mr Morrison! Are you looking for your daughter, by any chance? I've just seen her hand in hand with some Love's Young Dream, wandering moon-struck up and down the yew walk!' She laughed spitefully, and turned away.

Mr Morrison's eyes smouldered, and he elbowed his way back to his partner. He carried on a desultory conversation with her, but his mind was on his daughter.

'Mary!' he thought. 'My daughter. Walking hand in hand for every jackanapes at this dance to see, to sneer over. My daughter! A Morrison! With some cheap youth whom I

probably don't even know. Gets it from her mother, of course! Hand in hand, indeed!

He seethed with anger and impatience, and was immensely relieved when his partner said she must return in good time to the ball-room as she was bidden to dance the next number with His Excellency. He escorted her to the ball-room and handed her over to a hovering A.D.C.

— Then, with what show he could muster of aimlessly strolling about the garden, he made his way towards the yew walk. The next dance, number 7, was, according to the habit of years, booked with his wife, but he brushed the fact aside. What did she matter, when their daughter was misbehaving herself? He was displeased with her, in any case, and besides, the honour of the name of Morrison was at stake. Hand in hand in the moonlight, forsooth! Let his wife wait for him. Do her good!

By the time he reached the entrance to the yew walk, he had worked himself into a proper rage.

Yes! There they were! The shameless hussy! Mary was sitting on an ornamental stone bench with some youth—young Thompson, Mr Morrison thought it was—standing beside her. As her father paused at the entrance to the walk, the young man tilted Mary's face up towards his, and began speaking earnestly, slowly.

The older man paused, struck by the scene being enacted before him. Somehow he ceased to see Mary, his daughter, but only a man and a girl, their heads outlined in brilliant, pure moonlight, and all the rest in shadow. Pure, that was it. He knew he was seeing something meant for no man's eyes, but he could not leave. The girl dropped her eyes. Suddenly she raised her head, and looked the boy in the eyes. After a moment or two the boy dropped on to the seat beside her. He grasped her by the shoulders and kissed her; deeply, slowly, thoughtfully.

Mr Morrison turned away. Quickly he made his way to the entrance of the ball-room, where his wife was awaiting him with a hunted, dull look on her face. The band was playing the Blue Danube.

'Hello, my dear!' he said gaily. 'I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. Shall we dance? We danced to this tune often when we were engaged, d'you remember? Or shall we stroll in the moonlight, in memory of our lost youth?'

The Wedding Ring

A TALE OF DELHI

Alan Stuart opened one eye, decided that the day promised to be cold and sunless, and shut it again. Then he remembered. He rolled over and sat up with a grunt. Today he and George Murray, who was in the same battalion as himself, started their forty-eight hours' leave. They had decided to take a picnic lunch to the Purana Qila, one of the finest remains of a bygone glorious Delhi.

Alan performed his morning toilet, ate a hearty breakfast, pumped up his bicycle tyres, and set off to meet George.

They had chosen to go to the Purana Qila because George was an enthusiastic photographer, and wished to mirror the Sher Shah Mosque, one of the best and oldest in Delhi. A few days ago there had been a notice in the papers saying that under the Defence of India Rules the Qila area would thenceforth remain closed to members of the public, except for the purpose of visiting the mosque, which could be approached by way of the Water Gate only.

Alan and George, being on pleasure bent, had plenty of time to indulge their idle curiosity. When they arrived at the fork of the road whence a rough path leads off to the main gate of the Fort, they dismounted and stared at the walls. They did not know what they hoped to see, but they felt curious, so they just stared. True, there was not the usual collection of tongas and other vehicles standing outside, but there was nothing out of the ordinary, save a khaki-clad sentry standing at one side of the main gateway.

So they bicycled off again to the Water Gate. Mindful of the many cycle thieves about, they carried their machines up the semi-circular flight of steps until they stood breathless upon the wide gravel path at the top.

Then they saw. Most of the generous undulating lawns were partitioned off with barbed-wire fencing. Behind the fencing there were tents and huts, with guards standing here and there. And taking somewhat dreary exercise were men, women, and children. As they wheeled their bicycles towards the mosque, Alan and George approached nearer to the camp, until they saw that they were Japanese prisoners. So that was the explanation. The Purana Qila was being used as an internment camp. Alan laughed. His visions of a testing ground for secret weapons had vanished. The real explanation was far more mundane.

They stacked their bicycles with a number of others outside the formal little cypress garden before the mosque, applied chains and locks to the back wheels, and strolled across the garden to gaze out over the ancient walls. They watched the internees exercising up and down the pathways, and inevitably their thoughts turned to the countless other prisoners of long ago who had trodden the sloping way up to the fort, or had been dragged there by their ferocious conquerors. Not one would have been as well treated as these Japs, who had probably been conveyed there in a motor van, and were doubtless being given every comfort and attention during their internment, as is the custom of their British gaolers.

George and Alan strolled along the ruined wall until they could look down over the high sheer escarpment on the Jumna side of the fort. Hundreds of feet below, as they craned their necks over the edge, they could see the little Hindu temple, white-washed spotlessly clean, and clinging like a toadstool to the foot of the grim grey wall.

As he looked, Alan's eye was caught by a slight movement from the iron grille that barred an ancient drain half-way up the side of the great wall. He thought at first that it was a snake, or perhaps a mongoose, but then he saw that the movement was caused by a human hand inside, doing something to one of the vertical iron bars. What it was doing he could not, at that distance and angle, see.

George was engrossed in focussing his camera, so Alan settled himself comfortably in a break in the wall to watch the proceedings, if any. For some minutes nothing much happened. Then, along the cart-track that encircles the fort, came a cyclist. He got off his bicycle and walked along wheeling it, with his head upturned to the great wall of the fort rising high above him. As the man approached the grille, Alan saw a small white object fall to the ground in front of the bicycle. The man dismounted, picked it up, put it quickly in his pocket and, mounting again, he pedalled slowly out of sight.

Meanwhile the hand at the grille had disappeared. Alan called George and told him what he had seen. They decided to go and see if they could spot anything for themselves. They carried their bicycles down the steps of the Water Gate again, and free-wheeled down the slope and round the foot of the fort wall until they stood beneath the barred window that Alan had seen from above.

'I'm sure one of those Japs is trying to escape,' said Alan. 'Let's stay here and watch.'

'Right you are!' said George. 'But we can't sit out here in the open like this. We must hide where we can't be seen from up there.'

Leaving their bicycles leaning against the walls, as though belonging to somebody inside the little temple, they hollowed out for themselves a lair in the long dry grass growing beside the cart-track, and Alan wriggled his way in.

George mounted his bicycle and rode away. In about an hour he was back, bringing with him a powerful torch and a length of rope.

'There!' he said. 'Now we can tie up anyone we think looks suspicious, and see what we're doing at the same time. Has there been any movement up there, Alan?'

Alan had seen nothing, and George began privately to think, as the long afternoon wore on, that Alan had brought him on a wild goose chase.

'You're quite sure you did see something, and that you didn't imagine it?' he asked.

Dusk fell, but still they lay where they were. Suddenly George nudged Alan's elbow.

'Look out,' he whispered. 'There's somebody coming. Who on earth can be using this track at this hour of the evening?'

A figure appeared riding one bicycle and leading another. When he was within a few yards of Alan and George he dismounted and gave a whistle. As he did so, he looked upwards. Alan drew in his breath sharply. It was the same man he had seen in the same spot earlier in the day!

Then something small suddenly landed with a thud on the ground. It must have fallen from the barred window. The man picked it up, opened it, examined the contents, and leaving the spare bicycle leaning against the wall, rode off again.

Directly his back was turned, George ran towards his own bicycle. He jumped on to it, without waiting for any formalities such as lighting the lamp, and pedalled off.

Meanwhile Alan examined the abandoned bicycle, for which payment had obviously just been made. He took the lock off his own machine, which he laid in the long grass near his lair, locked it round the suspect bicycle, and, to make assurance doubly sure, he removed the valves from the tyres. The air hissed softly out, until both rims rested upon the ground. Then he returned to his hiding place, recoiled the rope, made sure that the torch was working, and settled down to listen rather than to watch, for it was dark, and the moon, which was in its first quarter, shed but little light upon the proceedings. In about an hour's time he heard a bicycle coming from the main road. It was George returning.

'Have I missed any fun?' he asked, as he wriggled his way into the undergrowth beside Alan.

'Not a thing,' said Alan. 'What about you? Where did that chap go?'

'Oh, I've got him taped,' said George. 'He's only a miserable cycle shop employee. I followed him there and went in to ask him the price of a second-hand bicycle for my sister, or some rot, and found out that he works there.'

Alan thought he heard a noise, and, straining their ears, sure enough both of them heard the small sound of something scraping and rasping.

'The bars!' whispered Alan. 'He must be filing through them. Gosh! I hope we shall be able to tackle him all right. D'you think he'll practise ju-jitsu on us, and break our backs or our legs?'

'Um-m. Hope not,' said George. 'I suppose we really ought to have told the police. But I tell you what! Let one of us tackle him first. The other can keep hidden until he is too occupied to see that he's got two of us to deal with, instead of one.'

'O.K.' replied Alan briefly. 'Toss you for it. Heads I go for him first!'

Heads it was. The scraping sound ceased, and as it was not pitch dark, Alan stood up and silently felt his way until he was standing, as near as he could judge, directly beneath the grating. Indeed he was, for he had been waiting there for several minutes when he suddenly received a soft blow on the head. It took him completely by surprise, but he laughed to himself as he realized that it was the end of a rope that had just been thrown out of the opening. All his senses braced, he waited, staring up into the darkness.

A few moments later he heard faint sounds of bumping and scraping, and the rope end swayed. In a few seconds he heard laboured, though soft breathing, and he flung his arms round a figure clinging to the end of the rope. The figure let out a cry and struggled feebly, but Alan was able easily to hold it in his arms. He called to George, and together they secured their captive.

Wheeling their bicycles, they made a discovery. Their captive was Japanese, certainly, but a Japanese girl! She was a pretty little thing, and her dark eyes showed no fear, as she looked from George to Alan and back again.

'Well,' she said defiantly. 'What are you going to do with me?'

'Tell us first what you were going to do,' said Alan.

'No, oh no!' she said. 'I couldn't. No!'

'Well, it doesn't really matter, but we're going to take you and hand you over to the police.'

Together they hoisted her on to one of the bicycles and set off for the police station. On the way she tried to wheedle them.

'Let me go,' she pleaded. 'I don't mean any harm to anybody. I am a Christian like you, and only half a Japanese. My mother was French. I only want to go and see my baby. The police will not let me go to her, and she is ill.'

'You're married, are you?' said Alan in surprise, for she did not look more than about fifteen.

'Yes, yes, of course I am married, and I want to go to my baby. Let me to go her. Do not take me to the police station. Let me go!'

Alan felt moved at her outburst, and raised his eyebrows at George, more than half inclined to let her go free. But George shook his head. Then he took the girl's hand as it grasped the handle bars of the bicycle.

'Married, are you?' he said slowly. 'Yet I see no wedding ring, nor even the smooth circle on your finger that a ring makes on any hand. No! You go to the police!'

The Curse of the Treasure

A TALE OF LUCKNOW

Upon the sloping lawn that surrounds the tomb of King Sa'adut Ali Khan, King of Oudh, there stands in Lucknow another obelisk, erected to some English soldiers, sappers of the Royal Engineers, who, nearly ninety years ago, were killed when some explosives which they were attempting to move, blew up.

Both these monuments are familiar to many, but only those with specially observant eyes have noticed another little group of two-stone tombs standing behind the king's mausoleum. Were you to pass that way soon after dawn you might perhaps see a slight girlish figure, draped in a plain white sari, sprinkling a few fresh champa blossoms at the foot of each tomb. She is almost the last of her line, and, in fact, the very last of the direct descendants of the old rulers of Oudh.

The brief history of these kings, who ruled for something like a century and a quarter, was picturesque enough, and makes eventful reading.

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In the year 1798 one Mahomed Ali Shah attempted to usurp

the gadi. After a short triumph, however, he was dethroned, and the rightful heir, Sa'adut Ali Khan, ruled in his stead.

One of the famous Begums took charge of many of the state affairs of this young and inexperienced youth, who began by being wickedly extravagant. She assumed control of, among other things, his personal treasure chests.

As the months went by, the young king, who began to realize the responsibility of his position as ruler over several thousand souls, noticed that his treasure chests were emptying rather faster than they should. He suspected that perhaps the old lady was being over-lavish in the distribution of the largess which it was the custom to give to the spies in the royal employ. They brought news of the reaction of the townspeople (those in the countryside did not count), to the lavish pleasures and entertainments devised for the amusement of the court.

But when he approached her, the old lady put her finger to her lips and motioned to her dumb negro slave to see that nobody was lurking within earshot. Then she sent the negro away, so that she and the young king were quite alone.

'Listen, my son,' she said. 'It is true that your coffers may seem somewhat depleted, but it is not really so. As you know, the throne upon which you sit is none too safe; soft and silken though it may seem.'

She patted the down-filled satin cushions upon which they reclined.

'So,' she leaned nearer to him, 'I have taken week by week, and month by month, several handfuls of gold and jewels. These I have hidden in a spot known only to myself, and amply guarded. When the moon is full, which will be in a few days' time, I will take you with me, and together we will bury more treasure. Should you lose your throne, you and I shall not want, for none but we shall have access to sufficient gold and jewels to keep us in comfort for the rest of our days.'

'It is well, O my dear aunt!' said the young man, and rising from the low couch upon which they were seated, he assisted the old lady to her feet, and together they passed out of the chamber.

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As the sound of their footsteps died away, a small head peered over the cushions piled on one side of the couch. Then a little girl, unperceived as she lay curled up asleep until awakened by voices, rose to her feet and stole from the room.

No child could keep to herself a secret such as the one that Roshanara had just heard. She ran to her father, who was a half-brother of the king, and one of his court officials.

'Father! Father!' she said. 'I was asleep among the cushions of the couch whereon sat the king, my uncle, and the Begum Fathma. They began to talk, and woke me. I heard my lady the Begum-Sahiba relate how she has hidden many jewels and much gold, in case my lord the king loses his throne. The Begum-Sahiba will show the king where she conceals them when the moon is full.'

'Is this really true, daughter?'

'You have but to wait three days until the moon is full, to prove my words,' she replied.

And so it came to pass. When the moon was full, two shadowy figures stole silently from the Chutter Munzil Palace and crossed the spacious gardens. Behind them, flitting from shadow to shadow, followed another figure, that of Roshanara's father.

Silently they took the direction of the Kaiser Bagh palaces. Only once the two leading figures hesitated, and glanced behind them, but after a moment's confabulation they continued unhesitatingly on their way. Presently they came to a woodcutter's hut, which they entered with no preliminary knocking. A few moments later the third figure also entered the hut. There was silence for perhaps five minutes. Then a dreadful scream rent the air. Simultaneously the first two figures were seen coming out of another hut about thirty yards away from the first one. They made their way back to the palace and entered through the doorway by which they had originally left.

The following day there was a great to-do, for the king's half-brother had mysteriously disappeared. The previous evening he had bade good-night as usual to his retainers, and that was the last heard of him. Roshanara, horrified to think that she had unwittingly been the cause of her father's death, sealed her lips and said nothing.

In a few months' time she was married to her cousin, but still she kept silence. The Begum died, still in the lap of luxury, and so did the king. So far as Roshanara knew, the secret of the hidden treasure died with them. Roshanara herself grew old, and with the increasing years the burden of her knowledge grew heavy. So one day she called her elder son to her, and told him what she knew. He had neither the leisure nor the inclination to go fossicking about in search of buried treasure, but he recorded the story among his reminiscences.

When he died, his son Nizam-ud-Din went through his effects and found the manuscript, which he read to his wife with great interest.

Like his father, Nizam-ud-Din was not particularly keen to embark upon any expedition, but his wife was made of more ambitious stuff. She nagged him until at last he studied the subject in earnest, and figured from his father's description exactly where the spot should be. A ramshackle hut still stood there, but it was uninhabited.

So one bright moonlight night he and his wife picked their way over the tussocky ground leading to the hut, and disappeared silently within. About five minutes later, a shrill scream of agony burst out. It died away in a dreadful groan, and silence reigned again.

The following morning the household was in a turmoil, for the master and mistress had disappeared! Searchers were sent forth in all directions. During the day one of them found the Begum. But she shook all over as in a palsy, and could only point, horror-stricken, at the wood-cutter's hut. Over and over again she mouthed some gibberish.

* * * * *

And so the years passed. Generation succeeded generation, and each handed down the story of the curse of the treasure. Gradually the family grew poorer, but none dared try to solve the riddle.

Then, about thirty years ago, Government decided to build a block of offices where the ruins of the wood-cutter's hut still stood. To prepare the foundations, the P.W.D. brought machines which furrowed great trenches through the ground. No sooner had the excavations started than one of the machines went wrong and would not move. The workmen, who knew the story of the treasure, refused, even when the machine was mended, to continue excavating in that particular spot. So the English overseer drove the tractor himself.

When he had gone about halfway along the proposed trench the horrified watchers saw the machine give a lurch and a jerk, while a yell burst from the Englishman. He did not stop, however, but drove on until he reached the end of the trench. Then he collapsed, and those who ran to his rescue found that by some means his shirt sleeve had become entangled in the machinery, and that his arm had been practically severed above the elbow. He was rushed to hospital, where, thanks to modern medical science, he was saved.

Meanwhile work ceased, and nobody would go near the site—until another overseer took charge. He examined the scene of the accident, and discovered that the machine had been thrown off the level by a log. Closer observation showed this to be a combination of metal and wood half buried in the earth.

He called a passing coolie who knew nothing of the curse, and together they dug out a large brass-bound case. As no ill-effects occurred, the workmen who were watching from a safe distance gathered round and dug deeper and wide, until no fewer than ten similar cases were exposed, their sides rotted here and there, and bursting beyond the metal bands.

Under police supervision these were taken to a Government office. There they were opened, and inside were bags of priceless jewels and ancient gold coins. By law these were all Crown property, and in any case, Nizam-ud-Din's family looked upon them as tainted, and would not lay claim to them.

During the subsequent search deeper and deeper yet into the earth, the workmen came upon the remains of a brick tunnel. Beneath its ruins, caught in the jaws of a diabolical iron trap were two twisted skeletons. These the family buried with all the rites appropriate to the descendants of a royal house, and it is they who lie at peace beneath the modest mounds still tended daily by the last of their line.

The Sunk Wreck

A TALE OF KARACHI

'Got the course book? Where do we go first? Old Dry Dock mark? Right! Take the stop-watch and tell me when there's one minute to go.'

Ronnie Graham settled himself comfortably at the tiller of *Marianne*, took note of the wind, thought out the effect of the in-coming tide, and mentally registered the prowess of the other helmsmen pitted against him.

As well as the tindall and the boy in charge of the jib and the spinnaker, his 'crew' consisted of Mary Moncton. Her role was to act as informant upon the movements of the rest of the fleet, to take charge of the course book, and, when necessary, to pull up the centreboard.

As the last ball dropped from the mast-head on the Club verandah the starting gun boomed out, and the whole fleet crossed the line almost simultaneously.

The Sindhi Yacht Club has greatly developed its fleet of tom-tits in recent years, and no less than fourteen of them were engaged in a race in the monthly Tankard series. Ronnie manoeuvred

Marianne into as advantageous a position as he could, and settled down to a long beat across the harbour. When he could allow his attention to slacken a little, he and Mary plotted the course. The Old Dry Dock mark over by the breakwater; Lighthouse mark near Manora headland; and then out to Sunk Wreck.

Lying about fifth in the fleet, *Marianne* rounded the first two marks, and then, with the wind behind her, Ronnie paid out the mainsheet as far as it would go. At first a smart breeze sent the yachts spanking along, with a chug-chug of wavelets lapping against the keels. But quite suddenly the wind dropped, and the fleet wallowed in an almost dead calm. It was hot, without a vestige of shade, and Mary trailed her hand over the side.

There was no question of manoeuvring for a better place in the fleet. Indeed, *Marianne* was as well placed as any, and Ronnie, one of the keenest helmsmen in the club, could afford to relax and devote his attention to Mary.

She was a curious little person, he reflected, as he looked at her clear-cut profile. One never quite knew what she was thinking about. People who hardly knew her thought her uninteresting, but Ronnie knew better. They were silent for a few moments, and the fleet wallowed a few inches nearer to the Sunk Wreck. This is a well-known sailing mark, and is used several times a week the whole year round, except during the monsoon, when the sea is rough and courses are set within the confines of the harbour.

'I wonder how the Sunk Wreck came to be here,' said Ronnie, looking at the crowbar set upon a buoy marking the spot. 'It's an odd spot for any ship to have gone down, don't you think?'

Mary made no answer, and Ronnie repeated his question.

Still no answer.

He looked at her, and was surprised to see a look of infinite sadness spreading over her features.

'Mary, what is it? Mary!' he said sharply, for her shoulders grew rigid and she shuddered convulsively once or twice. Then she dissolved into quiet sobs.

'Mary dear, what's the matter?' said Ronnie again, taking one of her hands to bring her back from the brown study into which she had fallen. She roused herself at the touch of his hand, gave herself a little shake, pushed the hair off her forehead and looked at him.

'I'm sorry, Ron,' she said. 'I was seeing things. And I felt that I'd seen them before. It was terrible, but it was wonderful. I'll tell it to you.'

'Yes, do tell me,' said Ronnie. 'What's it all about?'

‘That!’ said Mary, nodding her head at the place where the Sunk Wreck lay. ‘I know how it came there. Her name—the ship’s, I mean—was the *Sainte Marie*, and she was in commission at the beginning of the last war.’

‘Oh! Only that long ago?’ said Ronnie in surprise. ‘Then she can’t have been built more than about forty or fifty years ago. It’s odd to think of! I had always pictured her as being at least a hundred years old.’

‘I don’t know when she was built,’ said Mary, ‘but I feel that I know all about her last voyage. She was French, the *Sainte Marie*, and she’d put into Madagascar with a mixed cargo from France when war was declared. The Captain, Monsieur Jean René Vienot his name was, was a truculent sort of fellow, and he didn’t give a hoot for anybody. At Madagascar he took on a new cargo, and, despite all advice to the contrary, set sail for Saigon. They were having a pleasant trip, and were about six days out when they sighted a battleship. She was still hardly more than a smudge on the horizon, but Vienot declared her to be a German—“*Une de ces sales Bosches*,” he called her, as he spat neatly over the side. He was right.

‘The *Sainte Marie* put on all the speed she could, but it was useless, and the warship, which proved to be the *Hohenzollern*, soon came within hailing distance. The *Sainte Marie*, being totally unarmed, had no alternative but to surrender. Her captain and crew were all taken aboard the *Hohenzollern* and a prize crew took possession of the *Sainte Marie*.

‘Vienot and his men found themselves unceremoniously thrust into the hold, where there were already some twenty or thirty other prisoners, all Englishmen from a British merchant ship, which, being armed with one gun, had dared to reply to the fire from the *Hohenzollern*.

‘For about ten days all the British and French prisoners were kept beneath hatches, and on short commons. Then the English sailors were taken up on deck. Their French comrades waited and listened, but they did not return.

‘At first the Englishmen blinked in the unaccustomed sunlight. They were made to stand in two ranks while the Captain of the *Hohenzollern* addressed them.

“You don’t know where you are now, you men,” he said. “Well, I’ll tell you. You’re about twenty-five miles off a British possession, Gott straff her! You’re off Karachi, on the west coast of India, and tomorrow you’re going there.” He paused and leered at the men, unshaven and unkempt, standing before him. “But Himmel! You’ll be lucky if you reach it.” He paused

again, prolonging the agony. "If any of you do manage to retain a whole skin, so much the better for you. But I don't mind telling you, it's not likely! Now listen carefully, all of you."

'He detailed to each man his duties aboard the *Sainte Marie*, and gave them precise instructions what they were to do.

'The scheme was roughly this. The *Sainte Marie* had already been prepared. Every available corner in her had been drilled and filled with dynamite, and the Germans had packed into her all the explosives they could spare. She was to be manned entirely by the English crew, who, within range of the *Hohenzollern*, were to take her to Karachi harbour under her own French flag. Just before they reached the harbour entrance a hidden time bomb would explode and sink the *Sainte Marie* in the very entrance to the harbour, thus blocking the long and narrow channel for other ships.

'The German captain pointed out that it was no good the English crew trying to make a get-away and sail safely right into the harbour. The time bomb would take care of that. Nor could they attempt to alter course either up or down the coast, because the sea bed was known to be flat for several miles out and only a few fathoms deep, save where the channel had been cut into the harbour.

'With set, impassive faces the Englishmen listened until the German captain had finished. Then, without a word, they filed into the boats, guarded by armed German seamen waiting to ferry them across to the *Sainte Marie*. Once aboard, each took over his allotted post, and they set their course in the direction of the shore. When they were out of earshot of the *Hohenzollern*, one of the men cautiously made his way to the bridge and approached the Captain in charge of the ill-fated vessel.

"It's just a chance, Sir," he said rapidly. "I know Karachi harbour well. I've been in there often, sir, and I can tell you this. You know the shape of the harbour, Sir,—Manora headland on one side and a long breakwater on the other—well, from where the *Hohenzollern* is lying, over beyond Manora, she won't be able to see accurately what course we're setting, once we get under the lee of the headland.

"If the helmsman is really nippy he can jam the wheel hard over and we can run her the far side of the breakwater on to the rocky shore." "Of course," he added apologetically, as though he, personally, was to blame, "I don't suppose any of us will reach the shore, but after all we don't really matter, and it's better than risking the safety of the harbour."

'The Captain nodded.

“Of course we’ll do it,” he said. “Go round quietly and tell every man. Then come back here.”

The seaman did as he was bid. Returning to the bridge, he took over the wheel. At the exact moment that he had calculated, he spun the wheel, and the ship lunged round. She cleared the breakwater by inches, righted herself, and sailed on for a few cable-lengths. Then came a rousing, splintering crash as she went on to the rocks and blew up.

‘And that,’ said Mary, ‘is the story of the Sunk Wreck.’

‘Were any of them saved?’ asked Ronnie.

‘No,’ she said.

‘I say,’ said Ronnie, struck by a sudden thought. ‘How d’you know all about this? Are you making it up?’ he added suspiciously.

‘No! No, I’m not, I’m not!’ said Mary. ‘You see, the Englishman put in command of the *Sainte Marie* was my father!’

Power of Suggestion

A TALE OF PACHMARI

Mr Kalipada Roy, M.L.A., stood by the breakfast table and opened the post. He tossed one long envelope aside and gazed for several minutes at the contents.

‘Odd,’ he thought to himself, ‘how these circulars, or whatever they are, keep on coming. As a matter of fact, I don’t think they really are circulars. They’ve all been addressed in an educated hand-writing, and don’t look as if they’re done by some out-of-work clerk at so much a thousand. Perhaps somebody who knows that I began life as a mining engineer is trying to tell me that there’s a seam of iron-ore waiting for me to open up. But where? And who? And why not tell me in an ordinary straightforward way?’

Mr Roy again consulted the paper he held in his hand. It was not a letter, but a pen and ink drawing. The foreground showed stubbly turf with small out-crops of rock here and there, gradually rising to big boulders and crags, which eventually formed a cliff. Half way up, a yawning hole gaped in the cliff face, towards which pointed a large arrow, superimposed on the drawing. There was no writing anywhere on the page, back or front.

Mr Roy picked up the envelope and examined it again. It had been posted in Bombay, and was the sixth identical one to

reach him in six weeks. Always they arrived with the early post on Monday morning.

Another thought struck him. Perhaps it was an advertisement for a greeting card. But no firm would send six advertisements all the same, and giving no clue to the identity of the sender. And anyway, why choose Mr Roy, living in Nagpur, instead of somebody nearer Bombay?

But Mr Roy was not of a worrying nature. He gathered all his letters into a neat pile and interested himself in a hearty breakfast.

Indira, his pretty frail wife, sat opposite to him, and poured out his coffee. She herself ate nothing.

'What, my dear? No appetite?' queried Mr Roy, rubbing his hands together. 'I insist that you eat something! Try even a little fruit.'

She shook her head.

'No, Kali,' she said. 'I cannot eat. I have no mind for food when my little son is far away from me. Ill, needing me to nurse him, and you will not let me go to him.'

Her eyes filled with tears.

Kali began to bluster.

'I've told you many times, my dear, as I told you before we were married, that since you have become my wife, you belong to me. You must minister to my needs first.'

'Yes, Kali, but you promised to let me keep my baby with me,' she replied.

Indira had been a widow with one little son, and her second marriage had been arranged, much against her will, by her step-mother, to whom Mr Roy had paid a substantial sum. Although Indira was a widow, she was of a far better family than his, and her relatives could be of great benefit to him in his ambitious political career. Her little son was only three when she re-married, but after six months his step-father insisted upon sending him to a nursery school in the Nilgiri hills. It was over a year since he had seen him, and Indira's heart ached, for the school matron had written that she did not think Ooty suited him. Perhaps it was too high. Eight thousand feet did not suit all children.

But Kalipada would not listen. He pooh-poohed her fears and brushed aside her entreaties to be allowed even to visit the child.

'No!' he said at last, more violently than before. 'You are my wife now. You must do as I wish, and go where I go. A pretty fool I should look, spending a couple of months in Pachmari all alone. Besides, I need you with me. You know very well

that I want to go because His Excellency will be there, and I wish to approach him about the land-owners' tax bill.'

Indira sighed, but said no more. Mr Roy noisily drained his cup, pushed back his chair, and left the room.

Indira waited until she heard the car drive off, taking her husband to his office, then she went to her writing desk and poured forth all her pent-up anxieties to the matron in charge of the boy.

Exactly a week later Mr and Mrs Kalipada Roy were again sitting at their breakfast table. Again Mr Roy, M.L.A., was opening his mail. Once more he found a further copy of the mysterious picture. But he had no time to ponder over it now. He was a fussy, pompous man, and made a great to-do over preparations for the journey. Hastily swallowing his breakfast, he jumped up, stuffed the letters he had just received into his already bulging brief-case, and began to create chaos among his wife's perfectly adequate travelling arrangements.

However, at last they reached the station and settled themselves in the train.

After a hot but uneventful journey they arrived at Piparia, and Mr Roy again did his best to upset things by scolding the servants; insisting upon re-arranging the luggage, and asking needless questions of the motor driver. At last they set off on the beautiful drive up through the forest hills of the Central Provinces. They stopped about half way up at a convenient wayside bungalow for refreshments, and while Mr Roy was arguing with the car driver over the fare, Indira slipped away by herself, across the road and down a little wooded pathway, until she could gaze over the slow-flowing yet powerful river caressing the rounded boulders that lay in its path, and everywhere so clear that the sandy floor was plainly visible. Indira knew this part of the country well, for as a child she had spent winters at school in Jubbulpore, and summers in Pachmari, exploring the picturesque ravines, clambering up and down the steep mountain pathways, and going for day-long picnics with her brothers and sisters. But those days were long ago. She sighed, and gazed down at the river.

On each side of the water a wide stretch of firm sand wound into the distance, bounded everywhere by dense forest undergrowth and stately trees. Here and there on the sand were the tracks of animals and birds that had walked down to the water to drink their fill—cheetal, sambhur, here and there the lightly imprinted pads of a panther, and many large triangular marks of peacocks and jungle fowl that crashed clumsily through the foliage.

Bashir Ahmed Siddiq

POWER OF SUGGESTION *Deprad 81*
Studied

Indira sighed. If only she were as free as those wild creatures, instead of being helplessly and hopelessly chained to Mr Kalipada Roy, M. L. A. M.L.A.! Who cared for an upstart politician of few antecedents and less breeding? He thought she couldn't bear him a son, did he? Well, let him think so! She never would! But soon her mood of fierce resentment subsided under her usual mask of passive acquiescence, as she made her way back to the roadside bungalow, where her husband was still arguing in raucous tones. However, he was persuaded to get into the car, and they drove on. When they reached the cool refreshing air of the pretty wooded hills that she knew so well, even Indira's spirits revived a little. Mr Roy's house, situated as near as he could get it to the Government House and to the Club, was a pleasant enough five-roomed bungalow, furnished in European style.

The following morning, when most of the unpacking had been accomplished, Mr Roy was arranging his papers on his desk, and came upon the mysterious picture once more. Twist it which way he would, however, he could still make nothing of it. Being of a methodical turn of mind, he added it to the growing pile of exactly similar pictures, secured by a rubber band.

The days sped by. Mr Roy was not achieving such social success as he had hoped for, in gubernatorial circles. Somehow (and, thought Mr Roy privately, most unnaturally) His Excellency seemed disinclined to discuss the land-owners tax bill. He was only spending a few weeks in Pachmari, and would grant interviews to nobody save his Ministers.

Mr Roy discovered that every afternoon His Excellency would go for picnics on the hills. So Mr Roy, much as he disliked excessive walking, decided that he and Indira would do likewise. Perhaps they would be fortunate one day in picking upon the same spot as the Governor, when, you may be sure, Mr Roy would grasp his opportunity with both hands.

So, earnestly, and with little enjoyment for either of them, save that Indira was happy in remembering childish days of delight spent in the same spots, Mr and Mrs Roy clambered down to Bee Dam, White Fish Gully, and to Fairy Pool. One day, wearied of so much unaccustomed exercise, they went a little further afield, driving, at Indira's suggestion, down the Piparia road for a few miles, until they came to an open glade, where Indira as a child used to gather early morning mushrooms.

They drove off the road for a few yards, then stopped the car and walked, carrying a small picnic basket.

Suddenly Mr Roy muttered an exclamation. He stopped and carefully examined the scene that lay before him. His wife glanced

sharply at him, but he was so absorbed to notice her. Yes! There was no doubt about it! There, beneath his feet, was the stubbly turf, with small outcrops of rock here and there, gradually rising to big boulders and crags, which eventually formed a cliff. Half way up, a yawning hole showed in the cliff-face.

Masking his excitement, for he had told his wife nothing of the pictures he had received, Mr Roy announced that he would like to stop then and there for his tea.

Afterwards he told Indira that he was going for a scramble over the rocks. Placidly she took out some knitting and began to work. His Excellency the Governor and a laughing chattering party passed by her, and called out a greeting. Indira thought how angry her husband would be at such a missed opportunity. Occasionally she paused to glance up at the cliff. Two hours passed. The sun went down, and Indira began to feel chilly. But she pulled a wrap about her slim shoulders and sat on until darkness fell. Gathering up the picnic things, she made her way back to the car.

'Your master has not returned from his walk,' she told the chauffeur. 'I have searched, but could find no trace of him. We must return for help, and to get lanterns. Perhaps he has twisted his ankle among the rocks. Drive quickly!'

She stopped at the police station and informed the sergeant on duty of her husband's disappearance, and then went on to the house to collect searchers and lights. Back she went with them to the spot, and untiringly they searched far into the night. Early the next morning the police joined in the search. Indira, worn out with the night's exertions, remained at home.

In the afternoon the Inspector-General of Police came to see her.

'I very much fear that your husband may have lost his life, Mrs Roy,' he said. 'We have searched the hills with a tooth-comb for many miles, and even my best trackers can find no trace of him. But half-way up the hill, within a few hundred yards of where you were sitting, there is a cave. Inside it is quite dark, and in one corner there lies a large hole. It is so deep that we cannot find the bottom. I am very much afraid that your husband may have fallen down it in the darkness.'

With tactful expressions of sympathy the burly Englishman took his departure, thankful that the widow had received the news with such restraint and calmness.

When he had gone, Indira went to her husband's desk and extracted the bundle of drawings, which she burned in the log fire that was lit every evening.

Then she sat down and wrote a telegram addressed to the Fern Hill Nursery School, Ootacamund.

Double or Single ?

' so I suggest that we meet for luncheon at the Grand Park Hotel on Wednesday at one o'clock. I hope—and I am sure—that we shall see eye to eye. Both John and your daughter are far too young to think of marrying, as no doubt you will agree. But in any case, let us thresh the matter out by word of mouth.

*Yours sincerely,
Evelyn Magor.'*

Mary Wilton folded the letter and put it back into the envelope with a sigh.

'I suppose Mrs Magor imagines that I'm just another of these scheming widows trying to get my daughter off my hands when she's scarcely out of her teens. I hope she won't try to bully me when we meet for lunch—or luncheon, as she calls it! If she does, I'll be a match for her. Peggy is every bit as good as her precious John, although I must own that he's an exceedingly nice boy. But Peggy's such a child. And anyway, if it comes to that, how do I know who these Magors are? It's a good name, but lots of queer people have good names now-a-days. I suppose Mrs Magor was lucky enough to be here on a visit when war broke out, and remained here ever since with her darling son. Oh dear, oh dear, *how* I wish I weren't a widow! It's downright loathsome having to cope with this hateful Mrs Magor, wanting to discuss her son and my daughter. However, I suppose I'd better go and meet the old hag.'

In this somewhat uncompromising frame of mind, and determined to sally forth to the fray with her colours flying, Mary Wilton wore a new spotted linen with crisp white facings, and an absurd but exceedingly smart little hat.

As she walked into the Grand Park Hotel a few minutes after one o'clock, on the appointed day she felt ready for anything and anyone. She looked round the foyer, but she could see nobody filling the picture she had made—erroneously, as it turned out—of Mrs Magor, so she strolled to the cocktail bar and sat down where she could command a view of the hotel entrance.

A minute or two later a car drove up, the door banged, somebody got out and ran up the steps. It was a man. He hesitated for a moment as though looking for someone, and Mary idly noticed that he wore the uniform of a famous cavalry regiment, and the badges of a Colonel. He gave his cap and stick and a small brief case to the desk attendant, then came to the cocktail bar. To Mary's surprise he came straight towards her.

'Mrs Wilton?' he said. 'I'm Evelyn Magor!'

Mary laughed.

'Oh!' she said, 'and I was expecting a woman your signature'

'Oh, that!' he said. 'I'm sorry I didn't indicate that it was John's father writing, not his mother. But I'm so used to managing everything for him since he was a toddler that I forget that people who don't know me jump to the conclusion that it's a woman, when they see my signature. Let's have a drink before we go any further. Boy!'

He summoned a waiter and ordered two lime gimlets, Mary's choice. As he did so, Mary took stock of him. His features were good, and he had that clean well-brushed air of assurance of men who know their way about the world. His uniform was well-cut, and his shoes looked expensive and good.

'There!' he said, when the gimlets arrived. 'Let us drink to the pious hope that they'll give us a good luncheon here. I've never known it happen yet, but miracles do sometimes happen.'

Indeed they do, thought Mary, as she felt that her host's undeniable attraction gave an added sparkle to her eyes.

Suddenly she realized that this man must be the Colonel Magor who had won the D.S.O. in Normandy, and famous before that for his he-man attitude to women. Indeed, he had the reputation of being downright rude at times. She drew a breath and unconsciously tightened her lips. This man's son must be dissuaded from marrying Peggy at all costs. Probably like father, like son! Who could tell?

However, Colonel Magor seemed ready, in a distant manner, to make himself agreeable, and they talked of anything and everything except her daughter and his son. At length they strolled out on to the terrace for coffee and cigarettes, and Mary pulled herself together. She must not get to like this man. Indeed, she wanted, just as much as he, according to his letter, to sever all connexion between the two families.

'We really must discuss our children,' she said. 'Colonel Magor, I'm going to be frank. Your son John wants to marry my daughter Peggy. You don't want him to throw himself away on the daughter of a widowed nobody. Probably penniless, and anyway, nobody either you or John had ever heard of. Well, that sounds all very reasonable. But what about my point of view? I don't want her to be tied to a penniless subaltern! Forgive me for being blunt, but who are you? My husband was the head of Williamson's out here. That probably conveys nothing to you, but Williamson's is the biggest firm in India. The army, unless

it has the good fortune to be stationed in Karachi, Calcutta, or Lahore, or one or the other few industrial centres, knows nothing of merchant life in India. To the army man who comes to India, society consists of the army, with a few Government officials thrown in. It doesn't occur to him that India has its industrial side, just as any other country, and that many charming Indians, as well as Europeans, make their living here. Yet in England many of your friends work in offices and firms in the city. In India, if you do happen to come across somebody in business, you take a second look at him, as some kind of specimen you haven't seen before. No, don't protest! My father was in the army, and I married a businessman, so I have seen both sides of the medal. Why, when I first came to India, my father was stationed in Bombay, after years on the frontier, and he insisted that I must always ask his permission before so much as playing a game of tennis with anybody in business. But he soon realized that his idea of businessmen was all wrong, and that they were just as good as, and in many cases better than, his precious subalterns. Yet his early idea must be representative of hundreds of other army officers But forgive me. I'm afraid that I allowed myself to be carried away. All I really meant to say was that Peggy will have enough money to live comfortably when I die, and I am prepared to give her an allowance before that time. But I don't want her to get married yet. She's only twenty, and I want her to have some fun first.'

Colonel Magor laughed. And when he laughed his sternness relaxed, and he looked far more human, as Mary described it to herself afterwards.

'I quite understand, Mrs Wilton,' he said. 'But don't let's discuss that now. Let us get to know each other better first. I have to go back to my office in a few minutes, but I shall be more than delighted if you will dine with me this evening, and we can continue the discussion.'

Mary's tension relaxed. She realized that she had allowed herself to become needlessly worked-up. She flushed and laughed at herself.

'I apologize,' she said. 'I said more than I should have, and more than I meant to, but I became what my husband used to call the tigress defending her cub. Please forgive me.'

They met that evening for dinner, and many times more during the weeks that followed. Mary found that, contrary to her expectation, he had charming manners. But he seemed to be one of those people you never got any further with. Meticulously courteous, after three or four weeks, she found that in spite of his

original assertion that they must get to know each other better, she knew little more about him than she did after their first meeting. She enjoyed lunching and dining with him, but her sense of responsibility made her bring up the subject of Peggy and John's engagement. He, however, always turned it aside.

She did not see much of Peggy these days. Peggy would rush in between First Aid lectures and a game of tennis, kiss her mother, say she would see her in the morning, and dash off again.

Then, one morning, Peggy told her mother that she and John Magor had decided not to become formally engaged after all. They liked each other very much still; and there had been no quarrel. They decided that they would rather be just friends, that was all.

'I do hope you'll understand, Mummy,' said Peggy. 'I'm sure you will, because you always do. And I *am* sorry you've had to put up with John's fire-eating old father. It was noble of you, Mummy, for my sake, but you won't have to any more.'

Mary smiled to herself. She was dining with Evelyn Magor that evening. He came to fetch her as usual, and they drove to the Club where they were dining.

'Mary'—they called each other Mary and Evelyn by that time. 'Mary—I've just had orders to go overseas in fifteen days' time. And I must talk to you. No,' as she tried to interrupt, 'No! not our children, they can work out their own salvation. I want to work out my own. I want to talk to you about something quite different.'

But Mary insisted.

'Evelyn,' she said. 'I must tell you. Peggy came to me this morning and said that she and John had decided to "call it a day," as she put it. They've been seeing a lot of each other, as you know, and they've decided that they aren't enough in love with each other after all. As a matter of fact, I had noticed that Peggy was rather taken up with half a dozen young air force officers, although she didn't say anything, and I've seen John casting wistful glances at that attractive niece of the Mellors', who's come here with the Auxiliary Nursing Service. So John and Peggy have very sensibly decided just to be friends. So I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time, to no purpose.'

Mary stifled a sigh. It had been lovely to have him to look after her. She was an attractive woman, and never lacked an escort, but somehow none of them fitted in with her every mood so well as he.

Evelyn was silent. She looked at him to see why he made no

answer. He was gazing at her, but had obviously not heard a single word she had said.

'Mary!' he said urgently. 'Mary, I must talk to you. Now! At once! Come!'

Surprised, she arose obediently and they strolled across the broad grass lawn of the Club, until they reached the borders of the lake. They sat on a convenient bench and looked over the still water, silent beneath the moon.

'Mary!' he said again, after they had both lighted cigarettes in silence. 'Mary! I don't like women. You must have realized that. My wife, as I told you, I divorced many years ago. I fell in love at John's age, and was allowed to marry. In three months I realized that Bella wanted my money, my position—I am still heir to a baronetcy—and that she was already having affairs with other men. So I foreswore women for ever. But, Mary, when we first met, I liked you as a person, as a mind, and not as a woman. You so obviously didn't care a fig for me or my belongings or my feelings, nor even for my son. You were far more concerned about protecting your daughter from the pitfalls of early marriage. Obviously you weren't out for what you could get. So I respected you. And in spite of myself, I wanted to see more and more of you. I put off discussing the children to have an excuse ready for my other self—d'you realize what I am driving at? Mary, I love you. I've fought against it, and my other self has tried his best to reason me out of it. But it's a fact, Mary darling. Couldn't we forget our prejudices and let our two children marry each other, Mary—please . . . Will you marry me before I go overseas? Let's have a double wedding. Mary . . . please!'

Mary looked at him.

'Evelyn, we can't have a double wedding,' she said. 'I have been trying to tell you the whole evening, but . . .'

Colonel Magor rose abruptly to his feet.

'Forgive me,' he said. 'I might have known. My car is at your disposal to take you home.'

He bowed stiffly, turned on his heel, and strode across the lawns back to the Club house. Mary still sat by the lake, too stunned to run after him.

After what seemed like hours, she heard footsteps approaching. Then two arms stole round her, and Evelyn's voice whispered into her curls.

'Mary, can you forgive me for being a stupid, proud fool? I've just seen John, and I understand what you meant when you said there couldn't be a double wedding. But darling . . . please, please, let's have just one wedding, all to ourselves.'

The Box

I noticed them first when we were all kicking our heels in the Customs House, waiting for the convoy to assemble. Langham was young, inclined to be a bit pimply, and over-fussy in dancing attendance on his girl. She wasn't particularly attractive. Italo-Abyssinian, with luxuriant black hair, not frizzy and negroid, but with a definitely cocoanut oil gloss. Her complexion, as much of it as she allowed you to see under the thick layer of powder, was bad; strongly pock-marked and palid. She hadn't overdone the rouge, as so many of these girls do. Lipstick and eyebrow pencil were laid on lavishly, but she had had the sense to use a dark-brown, not black, eyebrow pencil, and a deep wine-red lipstick that toned with her eyes and hair. She was smartly dressed, and her whole bearing had an expensive air.

I was travelling to Alexandria from Addis Ababa, where I was a member of the British Military Mission to Ethiopia. I had ten days leave, and my thoughts were turning to a girl I had met in Alex a few months previously. The journey, by motor convoy, then by train, then on by car and finally by train again, was long and tedious, especially the first part, and it would have made away with several days of my precious leave, except for the fact that I was fortunate enough to be made O.C. Convoy. The lorries gradually assembled, and the passengers, mostly Greek businessmen, a few Abyssinians, and some other private citizens, displayed their passes, paid their fares, and we set off.

I sat in the cabin of the first lorry, and an English Infantry Captain brought up the rear.

The road covers about eight hundred miles of infinite variety. The temperature varied considerably throughout the day, because we drove for one hour across fairly level plains, and the next on top of a mountain, both equally colourful with a vast variety of wild flowers and brilliant exotic birds. We crossed one pass, not far from Addis Ababa, that was nine thousand feet above sea level. After it came the Mussolini Tunnel, which had been drilled by the Italians clean through a mountain. After that we arrived at the top of the world, where we could gaze over tens of miles on either side. The whole route was littered with wrecked Italian lorries and cars, especially round about the Death Pass, which runs up a mountain side for fifteen miles, with fifty-four hairpin bends.

We were ambling quietly along, lulled to drowsiness by the hot midday sun, when we were electrified by a sudden attack from a band of Shiftah. They lay concealed behind boulders, much as

their cousins do on the North-West Frontier of India, and they sniped at us more from habit than from anything else. I yelled to my driver to step on it for all he was worth, while I signalled to all the other lorry drivers to do likewise. But before the whole convoy had managed to put on speed the Shiftah decided to have another go at us. One of them threw a hand grenade, which wounded a native who was sleeping (he soon woke up!) on top of one of the lorries. Then they fired three shots into the door of the cabin of the lorry nearest to them, which happened to be the last one. By a miracle, one shot went between the driver and the Captain, one grazed the driver's shoulder blade, and the third gave the Captain a skin wound just above the knee.

We drove on another five miles or so until I judged the danger spot well past, and then we drew up. The half-caste girl looked a bit shaken, and hung on to young Langham's arm. He was obviously enjoying the role of protector, and pawed her in a sickening manner. However, it was neither the time nor the place to loiter, and when we had compared hurried notes, the convoy drove on again.

Eventually we reached Asmara, one of those hybrid towns which seem to be uncertain whether they lean more towards the emancipation and bustle of the West, or to the sleepy laziness to which they have always been accustomed.

I was kept busy listing the drivers and checking their loads, so I hadn't much time to watch my fellow passengers. But I did see young Langham and the girl strolling off arm in arm, followed by a couple of coolies carrying their baggage. I was pretty certain that I should run into them again at the only possible hotel, and there they were, seated up at the American bar, when I had bathed and come downstairs for a breather before dinner.

One expects Asmara to be pretty hot in May, but added to this, it was oppressive and thundery. I wondered if it would rain that night, and prevent the convoy from going further. Sure enough, it did, and we were mud-bound for nearly a week.

It took a couple of days to finish off my work, and then I had time to look around. Langham and his girl friend were still in the hotel. I couldn't imagine what she would do with herself when he went on to Cairo. She couldn't go, I knew, for passes were strictly scrutinized. Moreover, no women were permitted the other side of Asmara. Obviously she did not belong to the town. Equally obviously she could not return alone to Addis Ababa by army convoy.

Eventually the desert dried up and the convoy assembled. Langham appeared, minus his girl friend. I remember inwardly

registering surprise that she had not shown up to see him off. But it was pretty early in the morning, and cloudy and uninviting. I hadn't time to wonder for long, however, as I was still in charge of the convoy, and there was a good deal to see to.

We set off and travelled by lorry, by train, and even, for a couple of miles or so across a treacherously wet *wadi*, on foot. I was busy with routine official matters, but I did notice that Langham was fussing over the transport of a large and apparently heavy wooden box he had with him.

The last lap of the journey was by train. At the end of the road I handed over to the railway authorities. My responsibilities were over, and my leave proper began. The train consisted of old rolling stock with B.B. & C.I. markings on the carriages and trucks, and we jolted over the badly-laid line at a snail's pace. Most of the window glass was broken, the electric fans weren't working, and the sun blazed down.

Eventually, towards evening, we arrived, the train jolting over the points and pulling up at the shabby platform. I was leaning out of the window as we drew alongside, and I noticed a Major and a couple of red-caps standing behind the row of squatting coolies waiting to hump luggage, and to unload the wagons.

Langham happened to be in the next carriage to mine, and as I was getting my kit out on to the platform I was surprised to see that the officer was serving a warrant for arrest upon him. Langham was protesting vehemently, and obviously he was rather frightened.

'Look here,' he said. 'I say, Sir, you can't do a thing like this. Can he . . . ?' and to my horror, he appealed to me.

'What's the charge?' I asked.

It proved to be some business about accounts. He hadn't been tampering with his unit finance, or anything like that. He had simply forgotten to send in the returns for some fund or other, despite repeated reminders. After ignoring several warnings (which he said he never received) a warrant had been issued for his arrest, and here it was. There was nothing for it save to go quietly.

But still he seemed unduly upset.

'I want my luggage to be searched,' he said.

'But, why? There is no need,' said the Major.

'I don't care. I demand that it should be searched,' insisted Langham.

'Come off it,' said the Major. 'Don't keep us standing here. The sooner we get going, the sooner you'll be let off.'

Langham was so wrought up by this time that he seemed ready to burst into tears.

'At least open that big wooden box there,' he said.

'My dear chap, be reasonable . . . ' began the Major, but Langham interrupted him.

'If you don't,' he said desperately, 'I shall hold you responsible for the life of the girl inside!'

That was a different story. The policemen themselves took a hand, eager for any break that might relieve the monotony of their office routine, and began to unscrew the lid.

No sound or movement came from within, and they began to be skeptical about the presence of the girl. However, when the top was removed, Langham's story proved to be true. No wonder she had not moved. She was still breathing, but she was unconscious, and nearly suffocated through having lain exposed to the sun as the train jolted across the desert.

They lifted her out and took her to the local hospital. She came round in an hour or two, but it was a fortnight before she was well enough to leave the hospital, when she was sent back, under escort, to Addis Ababa.

Meanwhile Langham had been posted to Paiforce, and had left immediately, without being allowed to see her.

I wonder when he last gave her another thought.

But Two Came Back

A TALE OF ALBANIA

Hamish Hamilton sprang up from his camp bed, and, still half asleep, he ran, stumbling in the darkness, towards his machine, strapping on his accoutrements as he went, buckles and webbing banging against his thighs.

This was his first call to action since being promoted to one of the big bombers which carried a crew of three; the pilot (himself), sergeant-observer, John Mahon, and rear gunner, Jerry Broome.

They all clambered in, Hamish and John in front, and Jerry to crouch in his uncomfortable rear turret. With a whirr of the powerful engines, the huge aeroplane taxied across the hastily improvised landing-field.

Soon they left the ground, and circled round to gain height, leaving the neat fields and vineyards of the Albanian countryside far below. The squadron were flying in formation with orders to

head westwards, and to impede by every possible means the German mechanized columns near Valona.

For about half an hour Hamish flew steadily on. It was growing light now, nearly six o'clock on a cold spring morning, and he cast his mind back lazily to other chilly spring mornings; cubbing over the misty English countryside, setting out for the snow-covered ski-slopes of Murree, or for a day's rough shooting in Baluchistan. The scenery below varied several times from neat tilled fields to rugged mountains, and from barren plains back to mountains. Come to think of it, the country over which they were flying was not unlike Baluchistan and the N.W.F.P. Hamish leaned over and nudged Jerry.

'Remember the day we drove down the Dilkhuna Pass from Loralai and saw those "mouflon",' he said, raising his voice above the drone of the engines.

John looked in the direction in which Hamish pointed, and nodded. Far below them a stag and several does stood poised upon a rocky promontory.

Visibility was improving. Soon below him Hamish could see troops advancing cautiously; running a few yards, then dropping behind some convenient bush or tuft of tall grass to take careful aim; and repeating the manoeuvre time and time again. They flew on, and the fighting below grew fiercer and more intense, and the roar of heavy gun-fire became apparent above the rhythmic roar of the aeroplane engines.

John caught a signal from the Squadron-Leader, scribbled it on his block and passed one copy forward to Hamish and another back to Jerry.

'Disperse rapidly, then use your own judgement. Good hunting.'

Soon Hamish, peering through the window in the nose, could see puffs of cotton wool bursting in front. He turned round and nudged John.

'That's where the Germans begin,' he shouted, and John nodded his assent.

The puffs grew more frequent, and came higher and nearer. The three Englishmen braced themselves for the job ahead of them. Suddenly without any warning, the aeroplane ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire. This would not do at all. Hamish swerved, and pulled the stick back. As they gained height, Hamish watched John out of the tail of his eye, scanning the landscape beneath them, searching for the German mechanized column.

Presently John nudged Hamish in his turn, and passed a note back to the rear gunner, but the latter had already spotted a long twisting snake moving slowly but steadily towards them.

'The Huns!' whooped Hamish. 'Here we go! Are you both ready?'

He put the aeroplane into a steep nose dive, and headed for the column. The dive continued until they were within a few hundred feet of the ground. Suddenly a devastating report cracked through the aircraft. The firing grew hotter, and bursts came all over them, but still Hamish held on until they could not have been more than six hundred feet from the ground. Something was wrong with the aircraft, for one engine was missing badly, and she did not answer to the stick as easily as usual. Hamish lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders at John.

'We're hit!' he shouted, emphasizing the obvious.

Then he felt a blinding pain and a shock as though he had been kicked in a rugger scrum. There was no time to think of himself, however, although he gave an involuntary glance at his thick flying kit, for he felt something warm and wet soaking through his overalls. With surprise he saw that a dull red stain was spreading over his thigh. Then he looked at his left arm. The hand was not there! Strange, for he felt no pain, only a sort of numbness. Quickly the shock wore off, and he felt the most blinding searing pain he could imagine. Setting his teeth, he kept the aeroplane steadfastly in the same dive, until it was only 300 feet above the German column, which was still crawling slowly on. Anti-aircraft fire was bursting all around the plane from strategically placed batteries, but after the first two hits the aeroplane was untouched. By some miracle the steering continued to function fairly well.

Hamish carried on until John gave the signal. Both he and Jerry had been too busy picking the psychological moment for attack to observe that anything had happened to Hamish, who gritted his teeth and hung on to the remnants of his sanity by an almost super-human effort.

John released a stick of bombs; then another; and then another, while Jerry fired round after round from the rear turret. Peering through his window, he could see several direct hits, and the consequent dislocation of the mechanized column. The road, which was one of the main arteries of the invading forces, was also badly holed, and in that unfriendly rugged country it was unlikely that it could be made passable for some days to come.

Hamish circled round once more so that John could observe the damage for his report, and then he turned his aircraft for home. They gained three or four hundred feet, then Hamish turned to John.

'I say, old boy,' he began. 'Be a good chap and bind up this ...'

Another frightful impact drowned his words. The whole aircraft shook as though it had been hit with a powerful jet of water.

'Well, that's that,' thought John, and the three glanced at each other. John had by now realized that Hamish was badly wounded, and he tried to take over the controls, but Hamish refused to give in.

Feverishly John searched for a level spot upon which to force-land. They were rapidly losing height, but as they cleared a low hill, John saw a short stretch of moorland with a rocky patch beyond.

'Hamish!' he yelled. 'Over there! Pull the stick round.'

With a supreme effort Hamish rallied his failing strength, and supported by Jerry, who had crawled forward from his gun turret, guided the aircraft in the direction of the little plain. Just as he had picked what looked like a reasonably smooth landing space, John gave a great shout in his ear. In the nick of time Hamish saw what he meant, and wrenched the stick back. They just skimmed a high tension electric cable which lay directly in their path to safety, and the aeroplane heeled over alarmingly. By what seemed a miracle, she righted herself and came shudderingly to rest. Fortunately she did not catch fire. John clambered out, and did his best to drag Hamish from the pilot's seat, but the latter was feeling too faint from loss of blood and from exertion to help himself. John called to Jerry to help him, but he, too, seemed dazed by the shaking he had experienced when the machine landed, and he had sustained a slight cut and a blow which stunned him for a few moments.

At last John managed to unstrap Hamish and to lift him out of the cockpit. Tearing the First Aid outfit from its place in the plane, he dressed the poor left arm stump as best he could. Meanwhile Jerry had recovered his wits. He ran to a dew pond a few yards away, and filled his leather flying helmet with water, which he dashed into Hamish's face. Then while John was still busied in making Hamish as comfortable as he could Jerry tried to get his bearings.

They were in a sheltered valley, wild and dotted with hillocks, and the more that Jerry looked at it, the more he marvelled that they were all still alive, although Hamish, poor chap, seemed in a bad way.

The valley was roughly oval, with tiers of hills rising into the steely blue sky. Nowhere was there any sign of life. Distant gunfire could be heard, but all around was silence, intensified by the sudden cessation of the roar of the aeroplane engines. Making Hamish as comfortable as they could John and Jerry started off on a short reconnaissance. They were pretty sure that they were

not behind the enemy lines, but the need for caution was obvious. Jerry climbed on to a little knoll that seemed fairly sheltered with scrub and bushes, and clambered to the top of a tree. After a few minutes he came scrambling down again.

'I think we're in luck,' he said. 'As far as I can make out, we're in No-Man's-Land, and several miles from either side. This valley that we landed in gets much wider at the shallow end, so to speak, and I can see guns firing from both sides of it.'

The obvious thing to do seemed to be to set off towards the wider part of the valley, and trust to luck for getting back to their own lines as best they might. It was going to be difficult, with Hamish as a liability, but better than either staying where they were, and waiting for the attack to converge on them, or heading across the valley in the direction from which they had come. The other two sides presented high mountainous cliffs.

John and Jerry returned to the aeroplane, removed a few vital parts, and made a fireman's lift for Hamish, somehow hoisted him on to it, and set off down the valley, taking advantage of what cover they could. Many times they stopped to rest, and the valley seemed endless.

Eventually, when they were approaching a small wood, John said:

'Look here, you chaps! Let's lie up in the undergrowth until evening. Hamish could do with a rest, I know, and we shall stand a better chance of getting away with it if we wait and feel our way in the dark. What d'you say, Jerry?'

The latter agreed. Hamish was in such pain that he took no part or interest in the discussion.

They reached the friendly trees, and crawled in beneath some bushes. Hardly had they settled down than a voice rang out, quite near to them, shouting orders. John's blood froze. The words were in German!

Obviously they could not stay where they were, so, with infinite caution, they crawled away from the direction of the voice, and started off again. It was more difficult to handle Hamish by now, for he had grown light-headed, and could not help himself in the slightest degree. However, they staggered on, chilled to the bone, unspeakably tired, and growing hungry. John assumed leadership of the desperate little party. Hamish was incapacitated, and Jerry was younger and less experienced than John by several years. Besides, Jerry had only recently left Cranwell, whereas John had been through the University Training Squadron, and had knocked about the world a good bit in the interim.

It was impossible to bring much thought to bear on what direction to try next, so they struck off at a tangent from the German post, which must have consisted of an anti-aircraft battery. Why the occupants had not seen the British bomber come down remained a mystery. After what seemed like hours, John saw a building looming up in front of them. Hamish was delirious, but was mercifully muttering in a hoarse whisper. He was obviously in the greatest pain, so they laid him on the ground, approached the building to make sure that they had not happened upon another mare's nest. There was not a sound. Cautiously, inch by inch, he pushed open the door. As far as he could see, the building was a large barn. Emboldened by the lack of any kind of reception, he crept inside, and felt his way gradually round the edges. The barn was empty, and, moreover, there was a heap of hay at one end, a perfect bed upon which to lay the poor tortured body of Hamish for a few hours' rest ; and for themselves. Heaven knew that they were badly in need of it.

Joyfully he made his way back to Hamish and Jerry.

'We're in luck at last,' he whispered, still preserving the greatest caution. The thought of a few hours' rest and sanctuary gave him added strength, and picking Hamish up in his arms, and as carefully as he could, despite the latter's near-screams of pain, he bore him into the barn and deposited him gently upon the hay. Jerry suddenly had an inspiration which both he and John had forgotten beneath the weight of the predicament they were in. John, as a sergeant-pilot, carried a small phial of morphia. Hamish's delirious cries had by this time grown louder, and might attract unwelcome attention. Besides, the pain of his wrist was becoming more than the poor fellow could bear. So John gave him a morphia injection, and Hamish, who was only twenty-three, fell back in a coma.

Covering him as well as they could with more hay, and making similar beds for themselves, John and Jerry immediately fell into a sleep of the dead. By the mercy of Heaven nothing occurred to waken them until the next morning was far advanced. John gave Hamish another injection, and then discussed with Jerry what they should do. It was many hours since they had eaten, and apart from some water snatched from a brook in passing, they had had nothing to drink either. It was obviously impossible to stay in the barn. Hamish looked a bad colour, even to John's inexperienced eyes, and the longer he was out of reach of a doctor's care, the less chance there was of saving him. With the utmost caution they peered out through a crack in the barn door.

There was still no one in sight, and no sound of guns. Indeed, the birds were singing, the sun was shining, and it was difficult to realize that they were desperate men, one of them dying, and all of them living a dramatic chapter of war. Jerry spied a hand-cart standing beneath a tree. Still exercising the greatest caution, they brought it into the barn, padded it with hay to make it as comfortable as possible, and to save Hamish from the worst of the jolts, and lifted him on. John did not care to re-dress the wound for fear of starting the flow of blood again, and it was obvious that Hamish had already lost far more blood than he could afford.

They started off again, guided by the sun roughly in the direction in which they thought that friends lay, but in this tumbled country it was difficult to keep the right bearings.

Still they saw no signs of human beings, and for all they knew to the contrary they might be walking slap into the middle of Albania. They were brought up short by a deep, swift-flowing river. Hamish had by this time sunk into unconsciousness, whether owing to the morphia injections, or through weakness John and Jerry had no means of knowing. They decided that, as speed probably meant everything to Hamish's life, they had both better leave him for a short while, and each go in an opposite direction along the river bank to see if either of them could find a reasonably easy ford or other means of crossing. John worked it out that this must be the Viosa River, flowing into the Adriatic, and that they must cross it at all costs in order to reach friends.

But in half an hour they met again. As far as either of them had penetrated, the river flowed on deep, swift, and wide, and they both knew enough rough geography to realize that in all probability it flowed on thus, uninterruptedly into the sea. They discussed matters at a short distance away from Hamish so as not to disturb him, and decided to find a better concealed hiding place until night fell. John was in front, and when he reached the cart he turned to Jerry.

'He's gone,' he said quietly. 'The poor boy died while we were away.'

What were they to do? It was obviously impossible for them, weak and faint from want of food as they were, to give him a proper burial, or, indeed, any burial at all. So John brokenly murmured over him the few fragmentary prayers that he could recall, himself feeling light-headed from privation and exposure. Then he went through Hamish's pockets to keep for his relatives any of those personal mementoes that mean so much. But there was nothing. Hamish habitually emptied his pockets and carried nothing but essentials when he was flying. He always left every-

thing neatly in his quarters. It was so much tidier, he had explained, and made less work for other people if by any chance you failed to return one day.

So folding Hamish's arms across his breast, John and Jerry, with heavy hearts, tramped upstream, each wondering privately if there was anything more they could have done to prevent Hamish's death. For the last few hours of his life, thanks to the morphia, he had known little pain, and before they set out for the flight he had been full of the joy of life, bubbling over with enthusiasm at the prospect of a few days' leave in Alexandria, a city he had always wanted to see, especially since he had met in Bombay, Calcutta, and elsewhere in India, several attractive Greek girls whom he knew to be in Alexandria, only too ready and eager to do all they could to give the gallant airmen of their great ally a good time.

On and on they trudged, each occupied with his own thoughts. John by this time was finding that his greater age, although he was only thirty-five, was telling on him, viewed against Jerry's youth. The older man felt that he must have a short rest, so once again they crawled into the meagre shelter of a bush, and both of them sank into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

Three hours later, as the evening shadows were lengthening, John awakened with a start, his strained faculties instantly alert, as he heard footsteps cautiously approaching through the undergrowth. In a few minutes Jerry appeared.

'I woke up some time ago,' he said, 'so I thought I'd scout round a bit. I haven't seen a sign of a soul since I left you. What's more, the gunfire sounds several miles further away than it was. I thought I heard an aeroplane in the distance once, but I didn't see it. What I did find was the remains of a bridge across this perishing river. It's evidently been bombed, but whether by our chaps or the Huns I can't say. I think we shall be able to get across it, but we'd better wait until it gets dark before we move from here. I could do with another spot of shut-eye myself, and I dare say you wouldn't say "No," either, to look at you!'

They gazed at each other, bedraggled and unshaven, and even in their starving woeful state they managed a wan chuckle at each other. Then, huddling close together for warmth, for the evening was already growing cold with the setting of the sun, once more they sank exhausted into a deep sleep, from which they awoke when it was quite dark.

Stiffly they rose to their feet and stretched their cramped limbs. Doggedly, without a word, Jerry leading the way, they stumbled on, making as little noise as possible, for who knew what developments might have happened while they slept. It seemed

to John as though they had been walking for hours when at last Jerry stopped.

'I can hear voices,' he said, and John's heart sank within him. But although they strained their ears for some time, all was silence. Jerry came close and whispered in John's ear:

'I'm going to creep on and investigate. You stay here, and give a low whistle when you hear me coming, to guide me to you I'll hoot like this,' and he gave a very fair imitation of an owl.

This time, through intense pangs of hunger and overstrained senses, John did not fall asleep, but sat couched with every nerve tensed, waiting for the sound which would tell him that Jerry had either fallen into the hands of an enemy patrol, or that he was coming back with news, good or bad.

At length, after what seemed like hours, he heard Jerry's hoot, and gave an answering whistle. Jerry crawled into the brushwood.

'There's a picket of Huns just beyond the bridge,' he said. 'They aren't keeping much of a watch, and evidently they aren't expecting any attack. If we go soon, we ought to get across the river without being spotted. Let's have a try now. Are you ready?'

Silently, Jerry again leading the way, they set off. The bridge had never been anything much to boast about, but it offered their only possible means of escape. Several times, as a loose piece of timber clattered from beneath their feet and splashed into the unseen river below, John's heart leapt into his mouth, but fortunately the river bed was stony. Large rocks protruded here and there, causing the water to cascade over them with a consequent increase in sound. Once Jerry, although he tried to test every piece of wood or steel before trusting his weight to it, found himself hanging over space, and for several seconds it seemed as if he must drop into the river below. But John, coming up behind him, was able to guide his foot to a small ledge whence he could pull himself into safety. Gradually they made their way across. It seemed like hours. In reality, it took them about twenty minutes.

On dry land again, they breathed a simultaneous sigh of relief, and sat down for a few minutes' rest. The extra exertion had tired them both a good deal more than either was prepared to admit. Then, as if by common, although silent consent, they scrambled to their feet and began to walk away from the river.

For several miles they staggered on, and suddenly John, who was in front, called a halt. They could hear the measured tramp of a sentry, with the click of his ammunition boots as he turned at each end of his beat. Dawn was beginning to break, so they determined to creep with infinite care a few yards nearer, and then

to wait until daylight showed them whether they had approached friend or foe. Stiffly, every joint aching, they crouched, scarcely daring to move, lest this, which was perhaps the last stage in their adventure, might prove fatal.

In about half an hour they could see the outline of the sentry sufficiently to know that he was not German. Both John and Jerry were so weak that in spite of themselves, tears welled into their eyes. John pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, Jerry did likewise, and they tied them together to make as large a show of white as possible. Then, standing up briskly, so as to expose themselves all at once, they strode steadily towards the sentry, waving their white flag as they did so, and with their arms above their heads.

The sentry challenged them, then called his comrades, who ran forward with their revolvers at the ready.

They were safe. Jerry, to what he called his everlasting shame, fell in a dead faint at the sentry's feet. John, more highly strung, perhaps was even more clear-headed than usual. He pointed to his uniform and said, 'British, Royal Air Force.' But the sentry was rightly suspicious of anyone approaching from the direction of the enemy, and kept him covered.

However, one of them ran to fetch the officer in command of the outpost, who came, and who, by the mercy of Heaven, could understand and speak quite a lot of English.

'I have the very thing for you,' he said. 'An American volunteer ambulance unit is with us just at present, and is shortly returning to headquarters. I shall ask them if they will give you a lift back.'

John thanked him, and asked if he and Jerry, who was by then reviving, might have some water and food. The officer immediately called a man, who ran into an adjoining tent, and came forth almost immediately with two jugs of steaming hot coffee.

'Wait a moment,' said the officer, and he went to his own tent, pitched beneath a nearby tree. He came back a moment later, and poured a stiff peg of ouzoo, into each jug.

'There, drink that!' he said. 'The Americans will provide you with a better breakfast than we could. I know that it is just about their breakfast time now, for I smelt the cooking a few minutes ago. I'll take you to them myself, and explain.'

Thankfully John and Jerry, who had recovered sufficiently to walk, supported by a soldier, went towards an olive grove where the American unit was seated under the trees having a meal before setting off again to their base.

The officer quickly explained the situation to them, and they jumped up with a 'Sure, we'll be glad to have them come with us. What's more they can both have beds in the automobile ambulance, as you hadn't sufficient casualties to give us.'

This sounded too good to be true. John and Jerry, after their coffee, found that they could eat no food, but that all that they craved was sleep, sleep, and still more sleep.

Ronnie

Tired and exhausted though she was, Penelope could not stop thinking about him.

'Will he be good to me? Blue-eyed men usually are' she, thought, 'and he has a nice open face. He's active and energetic too, which probably means that he won't brood. I hate men who brood; men like Uncle James, in fact. When Uncle James came to stay with us, we always knew what sort of a mood he was in, from his mouth. If he was broody, it was all tight-lipped and pursed-up. But I'm sure Ronnie's won't be like that. He won't be a particle like Uncle James, in fact. All this responsibility is a bit frightening, all the same... although lots of other people undertake it, so why shouldn't I! I suppose I can face up to things no worse than other women.'

'How will John get on with him? They ought to be all right, but with two men, especially when there's such a big difference in age, it's always a bit of a gamble. John can be a little intolerant, too. But I expect he'll understand better this time. He ought to, anyway. Darling John! He's always so very sweet and understanding where I'm concerned, that I know he'll make a special effort.'

'Anyway, I'm too weary to think any more about it now.'

She turned over, her pretty fair curls tossed over the peach-coloured pillow slip, and closed her big blue eyes. She was only twenty-two, and she had been through a good deal in the past few hours.

* * * *

John, too, was tired, but he, too, was thinking of Ronnie, as he sat by himself, a cigarette in one hand, and a modest peg in the other.

'Poor Penelope,' he thought. 'She's been through a bad time, and I only hope that Ronnie will prove himself worthy of her

She's a marvel, Penelope! So attractive, and yet she's never had her head turned. A good head it is, too, set square on her pretty shoulders. Ronnie will be proud of her, there's no doubt about that. They'll make a fine pair. I hope I shall be able to get to know him, and to understand him; but thirty-five years is a long gap between two men, and I'm afraid our points of view may turn out to be very different. Anyway, I shall do my level best to see that we keep in as close touch as possible.

'I wonder if he's the athletic games type, If he is, the old horse may be able to teach him a trick or two, and hold his own for a few years yet. Ronnie! It's a good clean plain English name. I hope it's owner is the same.

'Here's to Penelope and Ronnie!'

* * * * *

Penelope's mother was also thinking about her daughter and Ronnie. But she was far away in Australia, and her thoughts were mostly conjectural, and mainly concerned with physical attributes.

'What does Ronnie look like, I wonder. Is he strong and healthy, worthy of all the love that Penelope lavishes on him, and worthy of being her constant companion?

'Penelope! She's so young, so pretty, and so full of life! And she has been the best of daughters. Her father and I will, I'm sure, learn to love Ronnie as she does, and as we love her. Dear Penelope! Long life and happiness to them both!'

* * * * *

The Mess President of the Officers' Mess of the Royal Waziri Rifles rapped on the table. Instantly, the hum of voices ceased, and all eyes were turned expectantly towards the top of the table, where the Mess President was standing. He had already given them 'The King,' and they wondered what was coming.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Charge your glasses, for I have another toast for you this evening. You all know that it is against our custom to mention the name of a lady at our dining table, so I will give you but one word. Gentlemen—I give you Ronnie!'

There was a scraping of chairs, and a concerted murmur from twenty throats of 'Ronnie! Here's to him!' before the conversation again broke into the many isolated channels it had followed before the Mess President had collected all thoughts towards his pronouncement.

* * * * *

Penelope stirred and opened her eyes as the nurse came in, her starched white uniform rustling as she walked.

'Here's your son, Mrs Prendergast,' she said. 'Your Ronnie! Fancy! He's twelve hours old, the pet!'

Waiting

We lay on the smooth, firm sand, Sushila and I, and thought of nothing in particular—at least, I did. Everything was in harmony; the cool fresh breeze, the soft splash of the wavelets as they broke on the gently shelving beach, the swoop of the seagulls, and the full white clouds ambling gently across a bright blue sky—a real picture-post-card of a day.

Presently Sushila rolled over and began to draw little pictures in the sand, using a slender finger tip.

'There!' she said, looking at her drawing. 'That's us! Here you are, lying with your hands under your head like a pillow, and here am I, 'tother way up.'

I turned over lazily to look, but I found my eyes straying instead to Sushila's brilliant brown ones set in her nervous sensitive face. Then I made a drawing too.

'Here we are in a few months' time,' I said. 'Look!'

'I can't understand it,' she said, knitting her pretty brows, and I must admit that my drawing was not very good.

'It's us again,' I explained. 'Here we are each side of a fire. That's to show that we're sitting at our own fireside like a couple who've been married for years instead of only weeks. How I wish it could be now, instead of our having to wait for so long!'

Sushila sighed.

'So do I, darling,' she said, knitting her pretty brows, 'But somehow—I know it sounds a queer thing to say—the time passes quicker when you aren't here. It's because I get into a sort of groove, I suppose, when nothing matters but the fact that it's one more day nearer our wedding day. When we're together it's worse, as though our joint longing only makes it seem further off. And yet, when you've been away a long time, I sometimes feel as if I shall go mad, or kill myself, or something. Oh, dear, I wish I wasn't so silly!'

And then once again she told me how much she loved me. And indeed, she did. It shone out of her whole face, and reflected what shone out of mine. We were made for each other, we two, if ever any couple were.

We had been betrothed for several months, but I was serving with my regiment on the Frontier, and Sushila's mother wanted us to wait until the winter, so as to have a really big wedding in the Bombay season. Sushila and I did not mind what sort of a wedding we had, so long as we were married, but she was fond of her mother, and naturally fell in with her wishes. Besides, my unit was due to

move south during the coming trooping season, when Sushila would be able to be with me.

I had ten days' leave, and having no parents of my own, I stayed with Sushila, although half my precious few days were eaten up with the journey there and back. But it was worth it, just to be with her, and to refresh the memory of her sweet frank eyes, her fine arched eye-brows, and her clear-cut sensitive profile.

Tomorrow I had to start back on the long hot journey to the north. But today — nothing could be further removed from the rocky shadeless hills than this pleasant sea beach a few miles out of Bombay. The only similarity lay, perhaps, in the solitude, for it was a week-day, and not a single soul shared with us the expanse of firm yellow sand backed by the palm trees.

Sushila disturbed my reverie as she jumped to her feet and seized my hands, bringing me upright with her.

'Come on, Pip!' she cried. 'We've just time for a quick bathe before we have tea. Then we must make for home, or mother will begin to wonder where we are, and you know how she starts to worry long before she need. Besides, we're going to a dance this evening, remember, and I want plenty of time to change.'

The next morning she saw me off at the station.

'Not so very long, now, darling. Only a few more months! It'll pass quickly, and I'll write often. You will, too, won't you? You don't know how I depend on your letters when you're away.'

Her lips quivered at the thought of yet another parting. I promised that I would write very often, and she was momentarily cheered, but she seemed less able than ever to bear the separation, and she seemed to droop even as the guard blew his whistle, and I had to leave her.

The long hot day passed slowly, and for the most part I gazed idly out of the carriage window, scarcely seeing the countryside through which we were passing, but thinking over the happiness of the past few days, and of the far greater bliss that was to come. What had I done to deserve such devotion? Nothing. It was the most wonderful luck in the world.

I was fortunate enough to have a coupe to myself, so I undressed early and put out the light. Then I opened the window and gazed at the star-lit sky until at last I fell asleep. I was awakened by loud and prolonged banging on the door at the other end of the carriage.

'Some maddening passenger wants to come in, I suppose,' I thought to myself drowsily. 'What a bore! If I do rouse myself and open the door, ten to one it will be a mistake, and then I shan't be able to get to sleep again.'

So I turned a deaf ear. But the battering and knocking was accompanied by a voice, and suddenly I realized that my name was being called.

'Captain Premchand! Captain Premchand! Hey, Sir! Open the door! I have a telegram for you, an official telegram. Wake up, Sir! Wake up and open the door!'

Springing up, I hastily turned on the light, undid the safety catch, and took the telegram that was handed to me. Tearing it open, I read,

'War against Germany rejoin immediately unit preparing overseas Brixham.'

Colonel Brixham was the colonel of my battalion. Whew! So it had come at last! And what a show it would prove! Preparing for overseas. Service abroad! It was a grand prospect. But all at once I sobered down. Sushila! For the moment I had forgotten. What about our marriage? But then I brightened. We should just have to be married quietly, on my way through Bombay, that was all. I would send her a telegram immediately I reached Baluchistan.

I was far too excited to sleep again, so I sat up and looked out into the darkness. Some hours later the train drew into another station, and again the guard approached my window.

'Another telegram for you, Sir.'

I ripped it open.

'Unit already left proceed immediately join Karachi your kit with us Brixham.'

This meant a hurried consultation with the guard, with the result that I bundled my things together (I had no servant with me), slipped on my shoes and a coat, and left the train only a minute or two before it pulled out of the station to make way for the Sind Express. Fortunately an empty berth was available, and I settled down eventually to fall asleep.

When I awoke it was broad daylight, and we were passing the airport a few miles out of Karachi. We went through both the cantonment and city stations, and drew up in the military siding in the dock area.

Everything on the wharves was bustle and hurry, but the apparent confusion soon sorted itself into orderliness, and an embarkation officer directed me to my unit. I found them already embarked in a troopship, but having found my kit (we had all been under orders to have our overseas campaigning kit ready some months before), I sought permission to go ashore to telegraph to Sushila.

My heart was heavy. When should I see her again. No pictures like those we had drawn in the sand. No big wedding—

not even a quiet one, such as I had hoped for until the C.O.'s second telegram came. I handed in my message, but the man told me that the lines were overburdened, and it would be some hours before it went off. I could not tell Sushila where we were going. Indeed, even the ship's captain had sealed orders, and to tell somebody in a telegram that you love her, is difficult, especially when you are as much in love with her as I was with Sushila. Yes, *was*. I am still desperately in love with the Sushila that I left that morning on the Bombay platform. But now I will tell you.

My own movements from then on were, of course, merged in those of my battalion. Suffice it to say that we went to Europe and fought on foreign soil, where I had the misfortune to be wounded. Mails from India were fairly disorganized, of course, but I did get some letters from Sushila. At first they said exactly what I wished to hear, but gradually I discerned a tone creeping in that distressed me. Sushila sounded so bitter. Her statements, too, her invectives against those who had been the cause of our parting, grew wilder and wilder. More than half my letters, although I wrote regularly, seemed not to have reached her, and she reproached me for not writing frequently enough. Indeed, I longed more than ever to be with her, even for a few hours, that I might reassure her, comfort her, and give her strength to wait until I could be with her for always. Sweet Sushila!

The struggle grew fiercer, and we were sent to Norway, where I was wounded again, and then captured. I was well treated in hospital, however, and my leg soon began to mend. But I was a prisoner, of course, and no intercourse with my family was possible; or at least, it would take many months before letters began to come from India, even though the authorities immediately informed my old aunt, who was my next of kin. In a few weeks' time I was discharged from the hospital, and sent to a convalescent camp on the west coast of Norway.

Then the totally unexpected happened. One of the famous and daring raids, such as that made on the Lofoten Islands, took place near my camp, and the British soldiers helped half a dozen of us to escape from our guards, who were thrown into confusion by this highly unorthodox arrival. We returned to England aboard a British destroyer that had taken part in the raid.

By the merest chance a stray shot from the shore happened to find a resting place near my spine, causing temporary paralysis, so I again spent several months in hospital, this time Somewhere in England. Again, of course, people in India were unaware of my whereabouts, and I was myself unable to write for some time, so that I had received no replies by the time I left the hospital. My

first leg wound had been re-knit thoroughly, but unfortunately it gradually contracted, and became a couple of inches shorter than the other. So I was detailed for a course of instruction at an A.R.P. school in the country. This lasted for five weeks, and then I returned to India to become an instructor in the central A.R.P. school in Bombay.

The voyage was without incident. As telegrams giving any information likely to be of use to the enemy were not allowed, I did not expect to see Sushila waiting on the quay, but the moment I had dumped my kit at the hotel I jumped into a taxi and gave the wellknown address on Cumbala Hill.

The butler who opened the front door was new to me, but he showed me into the drawing-room.

'No, Sir, Miss Sahib not here, only Memsahib,' he said, in answer to my eager queries. 'I go call Memsahib.'

Sushila's mother came in, looking drawn and ill, and on seeing me she turned earthly pale and sank into a chair.

'Pip!' she gasped. 'Pip! It can't be you. Oh-h-h, my poor child, my Sushila! Oh, Pip!' and she began to weep so fiercely and with such abandon that I feared she might indulge in hysterics.

I had much ado to calm her, but at last she recovered her control sufficiently to speak. Amid sobs and outbursts of weeping she eventually told me the whole terrible story.

When I was wounded and taken prisoner in Norway I was listed as having been killed, and my old aunt, as next of kin, received a telegram to that effect. She wrote to Sushila telling her the news. Apparently the poor girl was prostrate with grief, and she became really ill, mentally, as well as physically. Her mother wrote several times to my aunt to enquire for further news, but she had no reply and eventually discovered that in the meantime the old lady had died. So they were cut off completely from any contact with me, and although they had made every effort to find out what they could, they had, as was only natural, merely received a copy of the original telegram containing the news of my death.

'But Sushila?' I queried eagerly. 'Where is she? I have a few days' leave. May I go to her?'

Sushila's mother sighed.

'I fear you will find her sadly changed, Pip,' she said. 'She is at present in the Kasturbai Hospital on Malabar Hill. You may go to see her now, but I must come with you. Ah—h my poor child, my Sushila!'

She would say nothing more, so together we set off. Arrived at the hospital, we went upstairs and along several corridors until

we came to a room at the end. Sushila's mother hesitated. Then she bade me enter.

On the floor in one corner of the room sat a thin white-haired woman. As I entered, she lifted black, dulled eyes to mine.

'Ah, there you are, Pip,' she said calmly, without expression, as though my coming was an expected every-day thing. 'See what I am drawing. Here we are in a few months' time, each side of a fire. That's just to show that we're sitting at our own fireside like a couple who've been married for years instead of weeks. How I wish,' she went on in the same toneless voice, 'it could be now, instead of our having to wait for so long.'

I stole quietly out, unable to bear to listen to her any longer. She did not even notice that I had gone.

Cause and Effect

It was late, about one o'clock in the morning, when the noise of shouting and laughter awoke the sleeping cantonment. One or two people turned over in their beds, which had been moved on to the verandahs for coolness.

'It's only Jumbo,' they said, as they turned over again.

It's only Jumbo. Not a thing to be proud of. Just one of those men who could not be expected to behave any better, but to wake up a sleeping cantonment in the middle of the night, brawling with his low-class friends.

It was a pity about Jumbo. He had been born of a good family. He went to a good public school, and then to Sandhurst, where he did quite well, although not outstandingly. He took part in the end of term display, and showed some ability for organization. His escapades, as, for instance, when he organized a party of G.C.'s to whitewash the lamp-posts of the park, and to throw one of the ornamental cannons from the entrance into the lake in the grounds, were attributed simply to youthful exuberance and high spirits rather than to any inherent vice. He'll settle down, they said. Once he gets his commission, he'll sober up and realize that you can't monkey about all the time.

But there were one or two incidents that did not come to the ears of anybody that mattered. There was the affair of Chrissie Mathews, for instance. Jumbo was an attractive young man, good-looking and impulsive, with the ability to carry other people with him in his mad schemes. He persuaded Chrissie to spend

a week-end with him in London. But when she discovered that she was going to have a baby, Jumbo turned yellow. Beyond sending her a five-pound note, and saying that it was all he'd got, and that anyway it was plenty, especially as he had footed an expensive hotel bill for that particular week-end, he did nothing.

And then there was a regrettable tendency to get into debt. His mother knew all about that, but she always paid up for him as far as possible, without telling his father, so Jumbo continued to run up large bills with his tailors, his boot-maker, his shirt-maker, and for the hundred and one other things that a socially-inclined young man must have.

When he scraped out of Sandhurst—with the remark 'could do better' on his report—he was posted to his father's old regiment, the Chalkshires, and after serving with the home battalion for just over a year, he was sent out to the second battalion, which was stationed in India. Exactly where, does not matter.

Jumbo found it pleasant to be on his own. He was somebody at last, and in command of a platoon of men. He could order the N.C.O.'s about, too, and he enjoyed even the simple act of summoning the mess waiter and ordering a gimlet from him. Indeed, he ordered a good many gimlets, and other things as well, so that at the end of the month his wine account was a good deal larger than it should be. His colonel, of course, saw all the subalterns' mess accounts, and he had Jumbo up in front of him to say that it must not happen again. But he undid all the good of his homily by adding, with a slap on the back,

'Boys will be boys, and I know it's good to be on your own, isn't it, Jordan?'

Jumbo liked his fling, and found several girls quite ready to play, too, but they, being country-bred, knew that their friendship with the attractive Mr Jordan must not come to the ears of his Colonel, or Jumbo's visits and his presents would cease abruptly.

The affair of Merle Lobo did come to the Colonel's ears, however, because Merle happened to have a mother who was an old soldier in her own right. She knew perfectly well that her daughter was no better than she ought to be, but she had no intention of allowing anybody else to know it, and she wrote to the C.O. to inform him that

'Mr Jordan of the Chalkshires regt; has taken my girl a good girl, out of her station, and by paying attentions to her has made her conspicuous and they is gettin themselves talked of and i dont like it, please to ask the young man is intentions, and if hes thinkin of marrying my girl. if not i shall have him up for Breach for i ave

witnesses that can prove as he as talked to her of marriage before their very ears.'

The Colonel was adept at dealing with such as Mrs Lobo, and he sent her away with no satisfaction. But he reflected shrewdly that there is no smoke without a fire, so he summoned Jumbo before him again, and told him to beware of girls with pretty figures and dragon-like mammas.

But Jumbo got worse and worse, and chased girl after girl, until he was kindly but firmly told that the Chalkshires no longer considered him to be an ornament to their unit, and that he was to make other arrangements if he wanted to further his military career. So Jumbo duly made other arrangements, and the papers went in for his transfer to the Armoured Camel Despatch Corps, which was then being organized. But even there he did not last very long, for he showed an inability to be present on parade on no less than two important occasions, both times because he had a date. One of these occasions was when the District Commander elected to pay a surprise visit to Jumbo's lines at a time when he should have been there. So Jumbo left the army, although not, unfortunately, without a stain on his character.

It did not occur to him to tell his father that the army had no longer any use for his services. At least, it did occur to him, but he decided against it. His mother was dead, and his father had married again, and really took very little interest in his son, now that the latter was independent of his parental care.

So Jumbo decided to stay in India. He had to determine how to earn his living, for his allowance from home ceased when he left the Chalkshires. The Armoured Camel Despatch Corps was not a particularly attractive body, so in order to lure officers to join it, the rates of pay offered were high. So what with having a new and somewhat expensive wife, and also disgust at his son's failing to carry on the family tradition that there was always a Jordan in the Chalkshires, Jordan Senior decided that Jumbo must in future fend for himself, and he cut his first-born off with the payment of any bills he knew were owing, but which were, as a matter of fact, but a tenth of the number he really owed.

Jumbo gave himself a drink at the Harbour Bar in Bombay where the authorities had thoughtfully paid his fare, and surveyed his qualifications for earning a living. He could dance, he could act a bit, he was personable, and a good mixer. Who would give him a job?

Eventually he went to the Park Hotel, Bombay's newest and brightest rendezvous, and offered to produce a cabaret.

Luck was with him. Indeed, luck usually seemed to single him out for favouritism. The management of the Park happened to be in need of cabaret. Now, immediately. A convoy was due to arrive at any minute from Australia, and the Park wished to attract patrons whose pockets would be full of money, for there was little to spend it on during the long and tedious voyage. This was the sort of thing to appeal to Jumbo. He liked doing things in a slapdash, hurried way, for then he could not be blamed for small items that did not run as smoothly as they should. People did not know, of course, that even if he had been given several months in which to prepare, the ragged edges of his scheme would have been just as ragged. He liked painting on a large canvas, did Jumbo, when you had to step back to see what was intended. It did not bear close inspection.

He sent a telegram—at the hotel expense—to Merle, telling her to come down and join him. They were to be housed free in the hotel's topmost and most inconvenient bedroom, and the duration of their stay depended upon the success of their turn.

It was a success. A great success. The Diggers came again and again, applauding, loudly appraising Merle's slender provocativeness, and buying Jumbo drink after drink. He had a private arrangement with the waiters that they served him with water tinged with angostura bitters when he asked for pink gin, and credited his account with the money, which suited him well.

He began to regain most of the old dash that had characterized him at Sandhurst. And unfortunately he found it easy to run up bills, and to buy everything that came into his head, without counting the cost. After a month or two, the shops became insistent. Moreover, the Australians had moved on, and there was no sign of another convoy in the offing. So one day Jumbo found, in his pigeon hole, a neat type-written letter from the management of the Park Hotel to say that they must regretfully dispense with his services and with those of Miss Merle Lobo, known to them as Titania, and that the room must be vacated by the end of the current week.

Jumbo was upset, but none-the-less, something always had turned up, and doubtless something always would. Merle did not matter. She could go back to her mother. Which, obediently she did, having enjoyed herself to the full for several weeks. Moreover she had contacted a number of admirers in Bombay, and, as luck would have it, they had been posted to her home town; so she was anxious to go back and exploit them as much as possible. For Merle was, as you can see, a gold digger, and as hard as nails. Nearly as hard, indeed, as her mother.

It was then that an idea came to Jumbo. Why not join up under an assumed name? He would like a bit of a scrap, and life in barracks had, for some odd reason, always appealed to him. When he was with the Chalkshires, he had been sorry that officers were not allowed to fraternize with their men. And since leaving the army he had met many good drinking companions among other ranks.

No sooner decided than acted upon. Jumbo became Private Arthur Snooks (yes, he had the effrontery to choose Snooks and to get away with it) No. 239671 in Rooke's Light Infantry.

The regiment underwent extensive training, and in a few months was sent off to the Far East, but not before Jumbo had scraped acquaintance with most of the girls in the station.

Almost immediately on arrival, Rooke's Light Infantry went into the front line, where they and the Axis troops attacked and counter-attacked ceaselessly, and in bewildering confusion. Finally, after they had been going at each other hammer and tongs for nearly a week, Rooke's Light Infantry went into the attack once more. They pushed the hated Japs well back, this time, until there was hand-to-hand fighting in the village of U'bong.

On and on pressed the regiment, until the Japs were on the run, and it only remained to carry out those operations known, somewhat realistically, as mopping up. Jumbo and his platoon came, hot-foot, to a hut with more pretensions than most of the village shacks, for it had an upper story and a strong door. They burst the door open, and, fixed bayonet in hand, Jumbo was the first to enter. Hardly had he crossed the threshold than he fell back, with a bayonet thrust in his body.

'Bomb them,' he panted. 'Dislodge them with bombs first.'

He was half-fainting, but he dragged himself to his feet and again insisted on being the first to enter, after the havoc wrought by the bombs had subsided. Up the rickety stairs he clambered, and he had nearly reached the top, when an unseen hand from above threw a heavy copper bowl down on his head, and he rolled down and lost consciousness.

When he came to, he was lying in bed in a forward hospital, and he heard voices discussing the escapade in which he had taken part.

'He's a fine man, that Snooks,' said one voice, 'and brave as be damned. Insisted upon going first up the stairs to shield his comrades. Darned good example.'

Jumbo felt too tired to open his eyes, but he gave a faint grin. His lips moved, but nobody heard the words they formed.

'It wasn't that,' was what he said, with difficulty. 'There was a pretty girl looking out of the upper window.'

She Was No Angel

A TALE OF AN UP-COUNTRY RACE-COURSE

Akbar Khan was beginning to get desperate. He had to have ready cash, and quickly. The girl from the travelling theatrical company was costing him more than he thought any woman could cost, and the money-lenders in Chotaghur were becoming impatient and even threatening.

The race-course would have to save him, as it had done many times in the past. He had already given the girl his two remaining horses. On account, so to speak. One she had sold at once, and the other, an Indian mare, would be no good for his purpose, as she was already too well-known in Durnagar. A new unknown horse would be necessary for the plan slowly coming to perfection in his brain. But why only one horse? Why not several horses, so as properly to confuse the officials? Thus the seeds of the scheme, still nebulous at present, were sown.

He cast about him for a suitable accomplice, and hit upon the very man. Mimi's friend Dolores, who supported her in her best act, had a Sikh boy-friend, one Kishan Singh. He, too, had found Dolores an expensive pastime, and would, Akbar Khan was sure, jump at the chance, not only to make some substantial ready cash, but also to pit his crafty twisted mind against those of the racing officials. He had not forgotten an occasion in Poona when the Turf Club stewards accused him—rightly, it is true—of pulling his own mare when he was riding her under a temporary licence. It was not that he had minded hooking her up—he would do it again—but it offended his artistic susceptibilities to be found out.

He and Akbar Khan drank many a glass of fierce country liquor together as they plotted and schemed, accepting this detail, rejecting that.

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George D'Oyley, Honorary Secretary of the Durnagar Race Club, looked up from his desk as the peon handed him a telegram.

'Am sending ten horses to Durnagar Please enter in suitable races Particulars follow Kishan Singh.'

'That sounds good,' he remarked to the Assistant Secretary. 'We can do with a few more entries in the Akaba Plate. Wonder why this chap has suddenly decided to come to Durnagar. Have you ever heard of him?'

Nobody had, but that was nothing unusual, and when the particulars duly arrived, the handicapper entered the horses as he thought fit.

When the race day drew near, D'Oyley heard unofficially that only one of the ten new horses would arrive in time for the meeting. She, a bay Indian mare named *Angel*, was being sent from Lahore, and would therefore be able to reach Durnagar sooner than the others which would have to travel from Lucknow. This cut up the fields a little, but it could not be helped, and at any rate the entry money had been paid up.

Akbar Khan was a deep one. He had worked out his scheme almost to perfection. In entering the string of ten horses, all but one of them was described as 'Bay Indian mare. No special markings', so that whatever race was chosen as one leg of the double event, he would have a hand in the winner, if he knew anything about it.

Kishan Singh approached a riding boy called Khudiyah, whom he knew by sight and reputation as being a quiet fellow with a wife and family, and who would jump at the chance of a steady job with one trainer rather than pick up rides as best he could. He held out promises that if the boy did well and caused no trouble—this was said significantly, but Khudiyah did not observe the full import of the statement—he would give him regular employment at a fixed salary, as well as the usual mount fees and percentages, and would also enable him to send for his wife and family.

Kishan Singh and Khudiyah travelled down from Lahore in the same train with *Angel* and her *sais*. Looking out of his third class compartment early the next morning, Khudiyah observed that Kishan Singh, who was travelling second, had been joined by Akbar Khan, but where the latter had boarded the train, he did not know.

When they reached Durnagar the day before the races, Akbar Khan told no one of his plans, but asked permission of some European acquaintances to stable the mare with them.

Khudiyah gave *Angel* a short gallop to stretch her legs after the confined space of the horse box, and happened to observe to Akbar Khan that he did not think that the mare was the *Angel* he had known a few months before, although he had never ridden her. Akbar Khan reassured him.

'Of course she is the same. She is apt to shy needlessly at the start, so I propose to run her in blinkers.'

Why Akbar Khan, instead of Kishan Singh, was giving him orders, Khudiyah did not stop to think. He was in regular employment at last, after months of near-starvation, and that was all he cared about. Premmy, his wife, would be able to feed the children on something more than rice and water, while he himself would soon be able to afford a new pair of racing breeches, of which he was sadly in need.

Kishan Singh, the owner of *Angel* and trainer of the others, according to his own statement, made himself known to the Secretary, and signed an undertaking to race *Angel* in Durnagar, to the satisfaction of the Stewards, for six months. With this proviso the Race Club paid the fares of race horses to Durnagar to attract good fields during the summer months.

Akbar Khan placed his money judiciously here and there at the tote windows, and also had *Angel* backed to win at 30 to one with the unauthorized bookie who did business at the corner of the road near the course.

'Lilac! Lilac! Highstriker!' shouted the crowd, in a vain endeavour to encourage their own particular fancies to pass the winning post first. But with plenty in hand, and by an easy head, *Angel*, the unknown, was the winner.

'She ought to pay well,' observed D'Oyley to his assistant, and indeed, this was the general opinion, for the Durnagar public were conservative and suspicious. They preferred to back an animal they knew something about, instead of trusting to their good judgement of a horse, to pick their winners.

But when the figures went up, the winning dividend upon the two rupee tote was only Rs. 6-8. The race was the first leg of the double event, and the owner must have known he was on to a good thing, and so backed his mare up to the hilt.

The second leg was won by a hot favourite, but the dividend on the double event paid Rs. 283, a handsome return for a five-rupee outlay.

Still no seed of doubt was sown in the minds of the Race Club officials. Why, indeed, should it be? *Angel*, a brown Indian mare, which ran in blinkers, had been ridden by her own jockey; a stranger to Durnagar, it is true, but the trainer Kishan Singh had, quite naturally, especially running upon a strange course, wished the mare to do him credit, with a man upon her back who knew her, and could give her confidence, and besides, he would be at his beck and call to ride work in the mornings, and also to race his other horses for him.

Directly the race was over, Akbar Khan hurriedly collected his winnings, and, without waiting for the last two races of the afternoon, he took *Angel* off to the station and boxed her for the Punjab mail leaving that evening.

The next day rumours were rife, and came rapidly to the ears of the Race Club officials that substitution had taken place, and that it was not the real *Angel* that had run at all, but another mare, also answering to the description of bay mare, but not to that of 'Indian', for, it was alleged, she was an English horse of a far better class than that in which *Angel* had been placed.

D'Oyley and his assistant wrote to various people, interviewed others, and generally got busy, but it was difficult to get a line on anything definite.

At last, about a week later, a letter came from the Secretary of the Jangalabad Race Club.

' Dear D'Oyley,

I have been going into the case about which you wrote to me.

The entire string of horses entered by Kishan Singh belong to various people in Jangalabad, and I don't suppose they had any idea that their horses were being entered. But I'm checking that up, as all the horses are still here.

I have questioned Khudiyah, who tells me that after he had won on *Angel* he was told that there was some hitch about the other horses, so he returned to Jangalabad.

I have no doubt that a horse was swung in on you as *Angel*, and all the others entered so that you would think that this was the Jangalabad *Angel*. It appears to me that Mr Akbar Khan is the nigger in the woodpile.

Yours sincerely,

George Young. '

Proof number one.

Gradually the plot was unfolded, and all its meticulous details lay exposed to the gaze of the Race Club Stewards. So well-thought out was it that they could not help admiring the brain that had conceived it all, and deploring the fact that such craft had been used for such an undeserving scheme.

To this very day one thing remains still to be cleared up. Where is the horse that ran as *Angel*? D'Oyley naturally made enquiries as to her destination, but she had been booked only as far as Chotagarh, some four hours distance from Durnagar. There she was unboxed, and she disappeared into the blue.

So if, in the next few months, you come across a bay English mare being walked somewhere in the country, one that is obviously not the *tatto* of some local zemindar, do your good turn for the day by dropping a line to the Hon. Secretary, Durnagar Race Club, telling him her whereabouts.
